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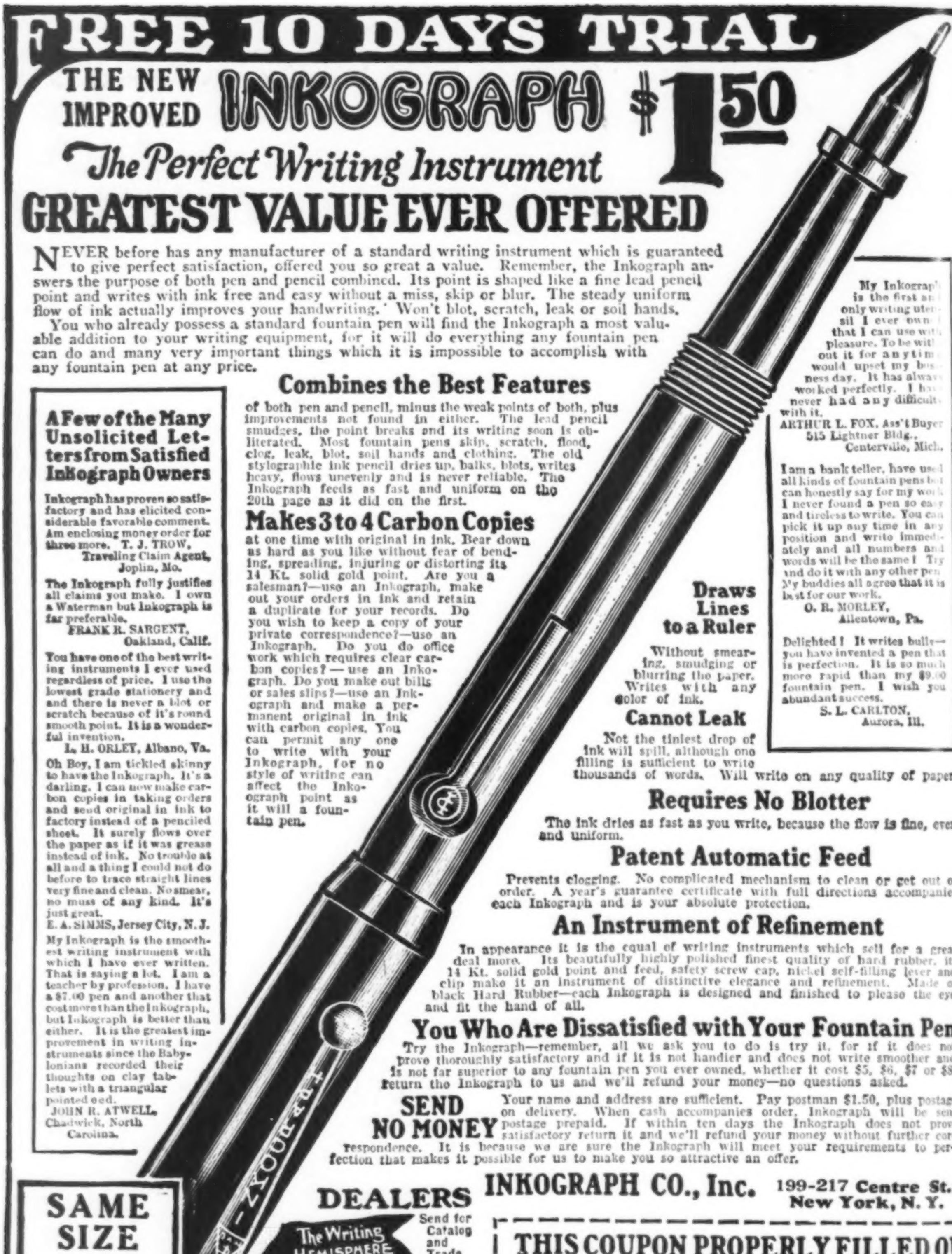

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December, 1927
Vol. LVII No. 6

Everybody's

OSCAR GRAEVE
Editor

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Cover Painting by Colcord Heurlin

Headings by Yngve Soderberg

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE RIDGWAY COMPANY
JOSEPH A. MOORE, President LEVIN RANK, Secy. & Treas.
SPRING AND MACDOUGAL STREETS, NEW YORK, N. Y., U. S. A.

Entered as Second-Class Matter, August 16, 1899, at the Post-Office, New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Yearly subscription, $2.50, in advance. Single copy, twenty-five cents. Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. No extra postage for Canada.

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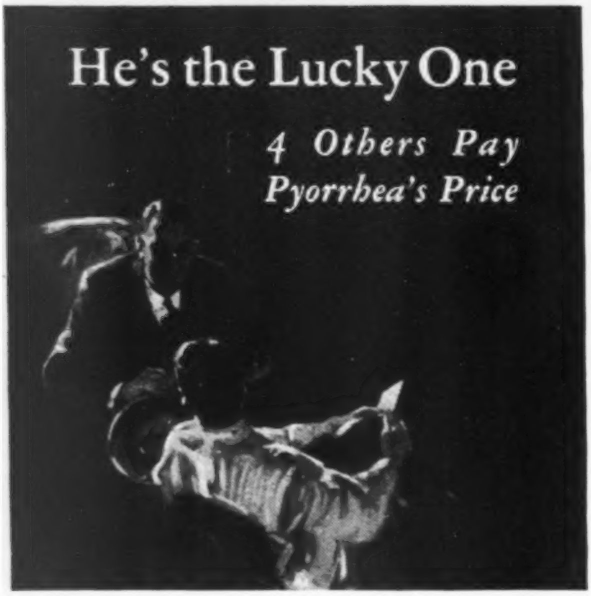

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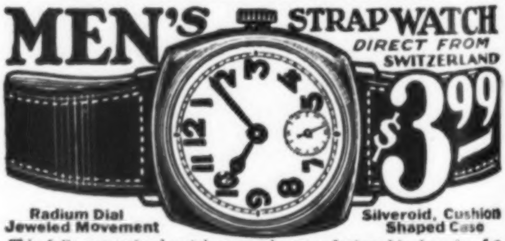

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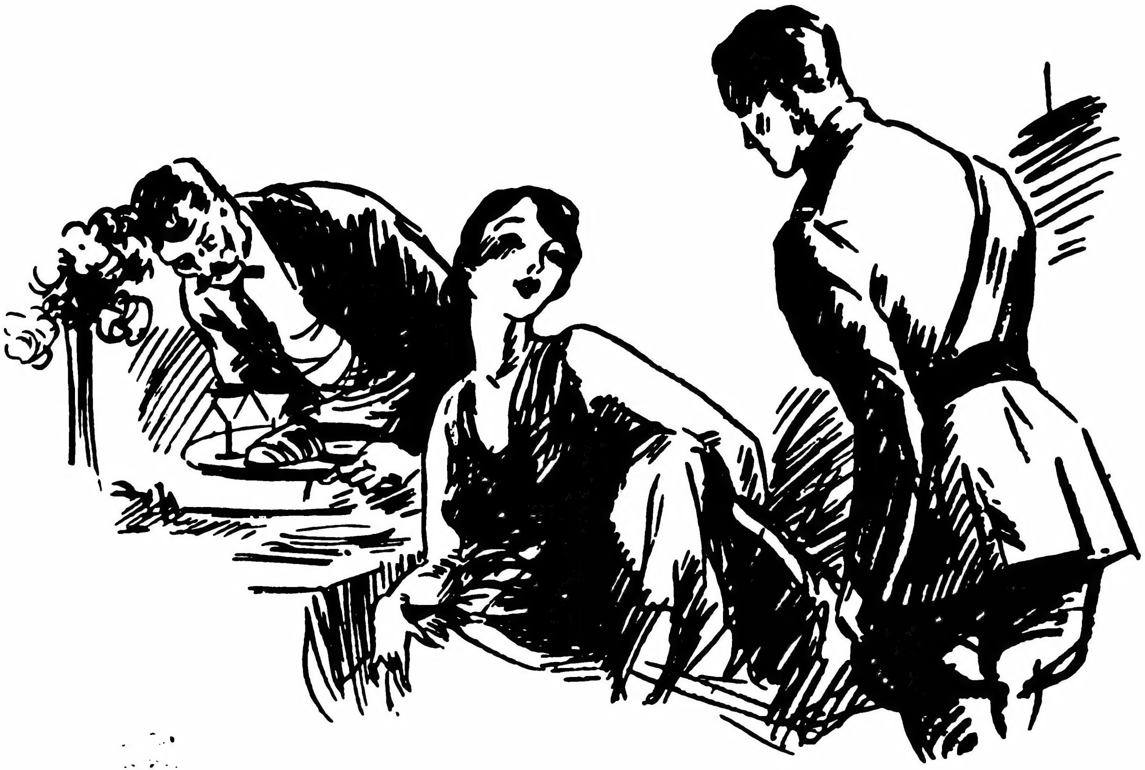


A Mystery to the Last Paragraph is this Spy Story of the Great War

Secret Orders

By ARED WHITE

CAPTAIN BOYNETON cast another surreptitious glance across the *salle à manger* at the compellingly beautiful girl who dined each morning alone, except for the brooding old Swiss who passed as her uncle and seemed worse than no company at all since he rarely if ever spoke to her.

The captain thought he caught a fleeting flash of expressive brown eyes in swift retreat; but when his eyes rested full upon her an instant later he saw that she seemed wholly absorbed in the neglected *jardin* of this wretched Belfort hostelry. If mademoiselle had been observing him as he sat at breakfast, she covered the fact easily.

He smiled whimsically as he looked at the picture of feminine loveliness that was framed in the window.

"Not exactly like the heavy-hearted monster that is commonly pictured as our much hated enemy," he told himself. As a matter of fact it was hard to associate such a creature as mademoiselle with thoughts of war—much less definitely suspect her of being a Prussian spy. Nevertheless, he concluded prudently, there was no taking chances since war was capable of such strange pranks among folks of every sort.

The young officer took advantage of this opportunity to study her closely. It was most unlikely, he thought, that mademoiselle would risk another glance in his direction; for in the ten days that he had been at this frontier hotel, passing her frequently, she had carried herself with a severe reserve, giving little outward evidence that she was conscious of his existence.

As he studied her face, Captain Boyneton found added difficulty in keeping alive the base suspicion that had flashed into his alert mind the moment he first saw mademoiselle. He found that she was even finer and fairer of feature than mere surreptitious glances had told him. And there was a distinctive refinement, a cultured good breeding, in the rare and gentle beauty of her face. Artifice had no part in the glowing texture of her skin with its subtle undertone of olive, nor in the rich, red coloring of her wonderfully chiselled mouth.

And in the next moment he was checking her over again, with cautious care, for some vagrant hint of artifice or intrigue. The search netted him nothing more than a growing assurance that he must be mistaken. Not only was she not of the *espion* type, but her fine nature was one that must recoil at the dangerous practices of espionage. Her attire only carried out the air of cultivated good taste about her; and he noted that the only jewelry she wore was a small, glowing ruby set in a narrow band of silver on the second finger of her right hand.

Mademoiselle, he told himself ardently and with a sudden sense of satisfaction, must be exactly what she pretended to be —the niece of the old Swiss hulk who bore unimpeachable credentials from his government as a neutral observer of the sensitive northern border of Switzerland. French suspicion of them had been aroused in the months gone by, too, but had come to nothing.

Of this the captain had learned soon after his arrival on the border by means of discreet inquiry of the ancient French *propriétaire*. The Frenchman had been not a little provoked that there should be a veiled suspicion of these good Swiss patrons of his who paid their bills so promptly and liberally.

"What more natural than that they stay here!" the Frenchman had demanded of the captain with an annoyed shrug of his shoulders. "Monsieur Goumpard must observe his country's boundaries—and nowhere can he do this so well as in Belfort. Is it not altogether natural that monsieur should wish to have the company of his charming niece in this delightful city which is so far away from his home!"

At the moment Captain Boyneton had agreed outwardly with the inn-keeper, handing him a discreet ten-franc note at the end of the interview.

"Please do not mention my inquiry to anyone," he had cautioned the Frenchman, in an effort to cover up his inquiry. "It might—might offend your guests to know that I have made such unjust inquiry into their private affairs."

CAPTAIN BOYNETON saw now that mademoiselle must have become conscious of his scrutiny since she shifted uncomfortably in her chair. He dropped his eyes to his unfinished breakfast. Where the Frenchman's earnest assurances had made no impression upon him, his own study of Mademoiselle Goumpard left him in a mood to dismiss her from consideration as a possible actor in the great, silent drama that was about to be enacted in this quiet war sector.

Certainly the explanation of their presence was logical enough, he told himself. Not far from the City of Belfort, the great fighting lines banked against the towering Alsatian Alps that mark the northern border of Switzerland. There, was fixed the extreme right flank of the vast Allied Armies and the vital left flank of the Kaiser's steel fighting monster. Both armies had fought desperately in the early months of the war to force those flanks. Both sides long since had abandoned the mad idea after paying a red toll of thousands of lives. Today the combatants secured their flanks lightly, using them as training areas for raw divisions or as rest positions in which war-torn veteran regiments might lick their wounds. Switzerland was left in vigilant peace while the crimson plague of battle spent itself to the north in endless ghastly frontal attacks of human battering rams.

The captain's military chauffeur interrupted his reflections by coming into the breakfast room with a secret message that had arrived a moment before from headquarters by motor cycle courier. He smiled faintly as he decoded the message. It read:

General and large staff arrive Belfort by auto tomorrow morning. Arrange hotel in accordance with previous confidential instructions. No change in situation. General and staff informed only of tactical plan and know nothing of your orders. You will continue under these headquarters direct.

He tore the message into thin strips and burned them ostentatiously, piece by piece, in the ash tray on the breakfast table. As he did this he watched the Goumpards covertly. There was yet Monsieur Goumpard to be reckoned with. But neither sieur Goumpard nor mademoiselle ced the slightest interest in him. This self was reassuring. The receipt of the message should have attracted them, he thought, were either of them moved by ulterior motive.

While the last of the strips of paper was being reduced to ashes, Captain Boyneton saw the Goumpards stroll outside, lead their bicycles into the street and ride off at a leisurely pace. The message reminded him that he must work swiftly. Since he had been mistaken in M. Goumpard's lovely niece, then his plans were all awry. There were German secret agents about this hotel. At least in Belfort. Of that he could be certain. And upon his success in ferreting them out must depend the outcome of the greatest opportunity for service to his country that Captain Boyneton might ever expect to meet.

"I'll be ready to leave Belfort in half an hour—to give some of the neighboring villages the once-over," he instructed the chauffeur in a voice that dismissed the soldier.

The captain took up a leisurely study of the servants in the dining room. With the general and staff arriving on the morrow, he must work swiftly in eliminating all who did not invite suspicion. The garçons were wizened, sluggish old men, or war-torn derelicts from the savage battle line, with a few rosy cheeked peasant girls with their large, muscled hands and lumbering gaits that came out of generations of wooden shoes and heavy toil. Teuton espionage hardly would trust its devious ways to the leaden intelligence of such as these, even could one be found who would betray the secrets of France for a consideration of silver francs.

One possibility alone remained when the captain's practiced eye had sorted them over. A gnarled, stooping old man whose dead eyes did not obscure a certain crafty cast of the face and a suppressed alertness of body. But this suspect evinced no interest in Captain Boyneton. The captain remembered that the fellow waited upon the Goumpards with never a glance in his direction. He noted him mentally for further observation, pushed back his chair and passed out into the dazzling September sunshine.

"Drive to Vesoul," he ordered the driver.

II

THE elimination of Mademoiselle Goumpard from definite suspicion had left him completely at sea and at a critical time, since the general's arrival was so near at hand. Until this morning he had been certain of success. His mind had fixed intuitively upon mademoiselle that day of his arrival at Belfort—and yet he was conscious now of a definite relief that the suspicion had been unjust, even though it did leave him groping. He told himself that he did not want to think of mademoiselle as playing such a rôle; that such an exquisite creature had no place in this grim thing of war, with a hangman's noose or firing squad forever stalking in her wake.

The picture of Mademoiselle Goumpard so filled his mind as he rode on that he started sharply at the sudden sight of her standing in the road. The car was moving swiftly through the environs of Belfort along the route to Vesoul. It drew up in a swirl of dust beside her and her Swiss uncle who was stooped over her bicycle trying vainly to mend the tire. Captain Boyneton leaped out to offer his assistance in the task.

Mademoiselle barely glanced at him, leaving discussion of the accident to her uncle. An inspection of the tire revealed a long sharp cut in the rubber which defied the small repair patches carried by M. Goumpard in his kit.

"I suppose we shall have to walk back to the city and have it repaired," Monsieur Goumpard complained in very good English, adding a shrug of his shoulders and a suggestive glance at the September sun which was now high enough in the heavens to make its heat felt uncomfortably.

"Ordinarily I should offer you the use of my car to return in," responded the captain, apologetically, "but that is forbidden by orders, as you may know."

He hesitated a moment, glancing at mademoiselle and her thin, low, riding shoes. She did not notice him. Her manner made it clear that she had no intention of embracing this chance opportunity of meeting the young American officer.

"Rather than have mademoiselle walk back, I will risk official displeasure," he announced gallantly. "May I present myself?"

She accepted the introduction and the offer of service with a gracious charm that seemed a natural part of her and stepped into the car with a few words of gratitude.

"It is very kind of you. I should not mind the walk back if it were not for having to lead the crippled cycle," she smiled; then dropped back into the quiet reserve that proclaimed her unwillingness to accept chance acquaintance further.

Mademoiselle thanked him briefly again at the hotel as he helped her out of the car. She went inside at once while M. Goumpard started with her cycle in search of repairs.

Captain Boyneton directed the car back at high speed to the point where he had met the Goumpards, now urged by fear rather than hope. Had the Goumpards used this method of meeting him? There was no escaping the unusual cut in the tire of mademoiselle's bicycle. It was a long, sharp cut that had all the appearance of a knife thrust. It would not have been difficult for them to guess that he would visit Vesoul today and thus lie in wait to rake up a natural meeting and first acquaintance.

Suspicion, his first intuitive impression, was stirred into unwilling life as he left the auto and followed the track of mademoiselle's bicycle to the point where he had picked it up. Perhaps she was the unsuspecting dupe of the sullen old Swiss uncle, he reassured himself. Or perhaps Prussia was sending its most cultured fräuleins into dangerous war service exactly as it had sent its finest sons—fired with a fanatical purpose to give all for the Fatherland. And if mademoiselle were an agent of the Prussian Crown, she was no ordinary *espion*. Of that he could be certain.

He bent low over the tracks, searching the fine dust carefully with his fingers. Mademoiselle's bicycle could not have moved more than half a dozen meters after receiving such a puncture. He would search every inch of the ground, for if the tire had been cut purposely there could be but one explanation. It would mean that the Goumpards had made their first definite move—that of making his acquaintance—a maneuver he had been expecting since the first day of his arrival.

In the midst of these reflections, the dusty track suddenly yielded to his fingers the thin, sharp surface of a discarded safety razor blade. It came out of the dust within a few feet of the point where the bicycle tracks broadened under the deflated tire. Examination showed that it was slightly rusted and must have lain out in the weather for some time. The thought flashed into his mind momentarily that it might have been placed there as a part of German thoroughness in carrying out the ruse. But he dismissed that thought as improbable. A smile of relief came into his face as he tossed the blade aside and proceeded to Vesoul.

"This war is enough to make a man suspicious of the angels themselves," he chided himself.

AT DINNER that evening, for which he returned to the hotel at Belfort empty handed, he saw as he entered the room that Mademoiselle Goumpard sat alone. She raised her eyes as he came into the room and spoke to him with a polite, reserved smile; and on an impulse he crossed the room and stood before the vacant chair at the table.

"May I have the honor?" he pleaded. "It is abominably lonesome here."

Mademoiselle nodded assent with a merest suggestion of mild reluctance. "Uncle is indisposed this evening and I was forced to dine alone," she said pleasantly.

They chatted through the meal with never a word of the war. Mademoiselle followed the subjects that the captain brought up; Belfort, the misadventure of the forenoon, the beauty of the Alsatian Alps. He found himself telling her of the equal beauties of the Rockies and of the wonder of his own country.

"I had always been told that Americans were barbarians," she laughed, although there was a serious note in her voice, a suggestion that the captain himself was the first evidence she had had that Americans might be civilized people after all.

"That is what the Germans are fond of believing," he replied lightly. "But then we say the same of them, since the war—so that evens things up, doesn't it?"

She reflected upon this soberly for some moments and turned the subject. "I take it you have been wounded?" she suggested.

"Do I look as if I'd been badly shot to pieces?" he bantered her, mildly pleased at this first touch of personal interest.

"Oh, no—I didn't mean it that way," she hastened to explain, smiling back at him. There assuredly was nothing of the invalid in the trim young officer with his clear blue eyes, high spirits and exuberant good health. "But I thought you must be recuperating—since there is no war going on down here—and no troops."

He flushed violently in the memory that he was a non-combatant whose duty did not require that he risk himself on the battle front. Europeans were not used to the sight of vigorous young men in these soft places behind the lines.

"I have been assigned to temporary duty here," he explained uncomfortably, then sought to cover his embarrassment with a pleasantry, "I thought I was being forced to the worst place in the world—but just now I am not certain but that I like Belfort immensely."

Mademoiselle ignored the pleasantry entirely.

"I suppose it is rather disagreeable to be located so far away from your comrades in arms," she mused, the note of reserve creeping back in her voice to tell him that his parry of a moment ago was in bad form, coming from a stranger on such short acquaintance.

"But I shall have company soon—almost too soon," he told her with ingenuous frankness.

"Then they are sending your soldiers here to join you?" There was no note of undue interest in her voice.

"Hardly that—what's coming is a high general and many colonels. Perhaps, also, a handful of majors. I suppose I shall soon have my arm in splints saluting them all, since I will be the junior."

He thought she started as he said this. But the next moment she was smiling at the picture of his discomfiture among so many high officers. And she dropped the subject, turning again to commonplaces at the very instant he had felt a vague suspicion that she might be drawing him out.

"It is delightfully cool outside—I think I shall go out for a bit of air," she said presently, arising. "You will excuse me?"

He hastened to draw back her chair. "If you would not think it presumptuous—it would give me a great deal of pleasure to join you," he suggested.

They strolled out into the intoxicating September twilight. Except that streets and vehicles were without lights, the city sat in a peaceful repose with not the slightest suggestion that the mad passions of the most cruel war in all history raged a few kilometers to the north.

Captain Boyneton felt a twinge of conscience that he was spending a part of the precious evening thus when there was work to be done—the most important work of the most important mission of his lifetime—a task of the most tremendous responsibility to which his most devoted efforts must be given. He quieted his conscience with the assurance that there still remained the vaguest uncertainty in regard to mademoiselle herself. It was an uncertainty of his intuitions rather than of his conscious judgment—but this evening should clear it up. In this humor he turned to the subject of the general and his staff, adding a vague hint of the importance of their mission.

"I hate to think of sharing Belfort with so many high-rankers," he tempted her, at the first favorable opportunity. "The general is said to be very exacting—although he's one of our great commanders and is bringing with him the finest staff in all France, I'm told."

MADEMOISELLE walked on in silence for some moments.

"Is their coming supposed to be—secret?" she asked after a time in a low, thoughtful voice.

"By all means," he replied quickly. "Their mission is of the greatest importance and greatest secrecy."

"Then please do not talk too freely about it," she warned him sharply.

Captain Boyneton looked at her in genuine surprise. "I hardly understand," he said. "I hope I haven't been tiring you with my military chatter."

"It isn't that. My father—my brothers

—have taught me something of the ways of the service. An officer must not talk idly even with his friends; for there are always —listeners—to pick up what is said."

He looked at her again quickly, with a sharp feeling of guilt.

"But I was speaking only to you—and no one could possibly mistake you for a spy—everything about you cries out against such a thought," he replied with sincerity.

Mademoiselle walked on in reflective silence for some time. "If my own country were in danger I should not hesitate to do my part," she said proudly.

"As a nurse, perhaps—but never as a spy," he protested. "You could not bring yourself to such treachery as that."

She laughed mockingly. "Is it more noble to kill—kill—kill! Is it fine and noble to shoot down fathers and brothers—and such a detestable thing to furnish your country with information that is needed to protect it from its enemies?"

Mademoiselle's words were suddenly bitter. There was an intensity in her voice that was not casual, that came from the bottom of her nature. It awakened the recurrent voice of suspicion within him again.

"The rôle of a spy—the very name itself—cries out of treachery, deceit, false pretense. Spies are hanged or shot wherever they are found," he charged her. "You would not fit into such a part as that—even if your country were in danger!"

"Do you think I would be afraid to die in my country's service!" she challenged him. "I mean if my country were set upon by the pack of military wolves. If I could serve by getting information—would it be treachery to pit my wits against theirs? Would that be any more treacherous than what you call your tactics and strategy and your whole way of waging war?"

Mademoiselle Goumpard interrupted him as he started to speak again. "But please let us not say anything more of this horrible war," she pleaded calmly. "One hears so little of anything else and there are so many other pleasant things left in the world."

They walked on in silence. Captain Boyneton found himself analyzing her mood, her words. Suspicion was hard upon him, a suspicion that he did not want to feel. But he remembered that the stakes were too high to take any risk of adroit deception. Might it not be her plan to disarm suspicion—and then draw him out little by little?

His mind turned to a final test. There was nothing in her manner that invited this. He must do it clumsily if at all. But the enigma of Mademoiselle Goumpard must be definitely solved—tonight. If she were other than what she pretended to be, she would accept his advances, in the line of duty, no matter how repugnant it might be to her proud and sensitive nature. It took all of his courage to slip his arm gently about her waist.

She drew away and turned toward him icily.

"I am deeply disappointed that I have been mistaken in you, monsieur," she said.

Captain Boyneton was swept by a flood of humiliation. He wanted to tell her that he would not have thought of attempting such a thing—ordinarily. But that would only betray the hideous suspicion which he had harbored and for which she might never forgive him. She had proved herself. Now he saw her only as a woman whom he had misjudged and humiliated, the first woman in his lifetime to whom he had given offense. He stammered an abject but clumsy apology.

"I think it is time to return to the hotel," mademoiselle broke in abruptly.

III.

A FORMIDABLE array of military limousines, sedans and touring cars drew up at the Belfort hotel early in the morning, to disgorge the portentous general and his brilliant staff. In addition to the general, whose stern appearance and proud manner varied in no essential respect from that of other generals of the day, there were twenty members of the staff; a colonel, several lieutenant colonels and an assortment of majors and captains.

There was about these officers, as they bristled out of their automobiles, a definite air of suppressed excitement. On every face there was a somber, taut expression that fairly shrieked of some tremendous military enterprise. The fact that two light Army trucks disgorged locker trunks and personal effects of the party betrayed them as something more than mere transient military visitors. Whatever their mission, it had to do with the environs of Belfort. And the fact that the staff was large enough for a corps—if not the nucleus of an army staff—confirmed the hint of military enterprise of stupendous proportions.

Their important, silent air only deepened the portent as Captain Boyneton showed them to their billets. In accordance with instructions, he had reserved the entire second floor of the ancient hostelry for them, excepting only the suite at the extreme northeast corner occupied by the Goumpards. Since the Goumpards were established and profitable patrons, the *propriétaire* had begged earnestly that they remain undisturbed, pointing out with much eloquence and many shrugs of the shoulder that his distinguished Swiss guests had brought their own furnishings from Switzerland—and therefore there was great imposition in requiring them to move to other and less desirable quarters.

The general summoned Captain Boyneton into his suite at once and closed the door. This hotel was not to the general's liking and he said so picturesquely, pacing the floor in considerable agitation as he dilated upon what he termed the outrage of quartering his headquarters and staff in such a place.

"Belfort is notorious as a roosting place for Prussian spies," the general snorted disgustedly. "This hotel is the last place in the world that we should be quartered in—why I'd a lot rather go into pyramidal tents out in the foothills if the French can't arrange for a suitable private residence!"

The captain offered no comment upon this. "I simply complied with my orders, sir, and reserved space in this hotel for you and your staff," he explained. "My orders were very definite and gave me no alternative."

"Red tape—red tape of the worst kind!" the general fumed. "They give me the most important mission on the books and then tie my hands at the very first move by sewing me up to a public hotel—one that's sure to be flooded with boche operatives. It'll wear a man down keeping his eyes open. Have you any idea of what I am here for?"

"Sir, my own work has to do only with certain phases of counter-espionage, with instructions to report direct to my headquarters chief," Captain Boyneton replied evasively.

EARLY in the evening, when he had returned from a swift drive into the foothills of the Vosges with his chief of staff, the general sent for Captain Boyneton again.

"Have you got a line on any boche prowlers—any suspicions?" he demanded.

"No, sir—I have been observing one or two persons, but am not quite certain," the captain reported.

"I find there's some Swiss persons right next to my own quarters. What do you know about them!"

"The man, Monsieur Goumpard, I have barely met," he replied. "His niece is a most charming young lady and, I am convinced, altogether incapable of the practices of spying."

"The best of them will do it—when they get that boche Fatherland idea they'll sell their souls to help the cause."

"Mademoiselle Goumpard is a lady of very fine breeding and a high sense of honor as I have had occasion to learn," Captain Boyneton averred earnestly.

The general pointed significantly to his heavy leather brief case that lay on a small table in the northwest corner of the room. "Do you know what that case contains?" he demanded.

"No, sir—perhaps the General's private papers."

"That hardly describes it," the general complained. "Those are the most important secret documents in France. They would be more valuable to the Kaiser at this moment than a thousand times their weight in diamonds." He groaned. "And I must keep them here with me—no steel safe—no quarters except this flimsy old hotel—an invitation to the Kaiser's spies. It is going to be necessary for me to sleep with them strapped to my body—to carry them chained to me if we are forced to stay here."

"The General could place them in a room under constant guard," Captain Boyneton suggested.

"Never! I'd trust those papers to no one!" the general snapped. "I alone am responsible that they are kept secret. I'd much rather be shot than have those documents disappear. Now, what I want is your suggestions as to the placing of a guard about my room, especially during the night when I have to sleep. You've been here long enough to know the place."

"No doubt a sentinel right here in the room would be a nuisance?" the captain suggested.

"Impossible," the general agreed. "My chief of staff thought of that. It's preposterous! Imagine being stripped of all privacy—of having to sleep with an armed soldier in my room."

The general strode across the room to the door and threw it open.

"It seems to me," he announced, "that a double guard out in this main hallway would serve the purpose well enough. I might also put one sentry downstairs to watch who comes into the hotel and—say a couple of men out under my window in the garden."

Captain Boyneton followed the general into the hallway while the commander pointed out the places he thought the inside sentinels could be placed to good advantage.

"Yes, sir," he agreed, "one man at each end of this hallway could keep an eye on everyone coming into the—"

The captain's voice snapped and he stood staring with distended eyes at the swift, silent drama that was being enacted back inside the general's room. Through the crack of the door which had swung nearly to, he saw a stealthy hand lift the leather case that contained the priceless military secrets. The hand disappeared with the case through a narrow sliding panel set in the east wall of the apartment. A moment later, as the general's leather case disappeared, another hand replaced the case with a counterfeit of identical appearance.

As the hand paused for a brief instant to adjust the position of the dummy packet, Captain Boyneton saw with pounding heart that it was the white, slender hand of a woman. Upon the second finger of the hand there shone a small, red ruby set in a simple silver band. The ring made identification certain. It was the hand of Mademoiselle Goumpard.

"That ought to solve the whole problem very well," announced the general, Captain Boyneton's interrupted sentence and his sudden wracked agitation having failed to break in upon the senior officer's thoughts and observations. "I'd like to see any boche agent get past one of my men alive with those papers!" The tone was grimly earnest.

The commander, having thus disposed of the problem of sentinels, turned back into his room abruptly, followed by the gaping captain.

"But some one must watch those Swiss," he exclaimed, turning upon Boyneton. "Are your duties such that you will have time to take care of that job?"

Captain Boyneton pulled himself together with an effort. "If the General really thinks that necessary—I'll do my best, sir," he managed to say, with poorly simulated calmness.

"I'm taking no chances," the general asserted. "Before I left headquarters, I was told something of them by a French liaison officer. If they try to follow us out on our reconnoissance into the Vosges or prowl behind us with picnic baskets—they might guess a great deal!"

"The French were suspicious of them, sir?" Captain Boyneton managed to ask, thickly.

"Decidedly—although they haven't anything but surmise. That old Goumpard has real credentials. But the French have a rumor that the girl is bogus. They've heard she is the very clever and cultivated daughter of a German high officer who was killed at the first Marne. They even went to the trouble of bringing a former English tutor of such a woman here from London—but the fellow only stared at her and said she wasn't the one. The more they questioned him, the surer he became that they were mistaken."

"Didn't—didn't that seem to clear the matter up, sir?" the captain faltered.

"Not altogether—they thought the tutor weakened at the thought of his pretty pupil swinging in the air with a rope about her neck. Can you picture a man who'd be sentimental fool enough to throw his own country down to protect a female spy!"

Captain Boyneton swallowed several times. "Not—not if it was his duty to turn her in," he replied soberly. "Duty to country comes ahead of all things—no matter what it demands."

IV

MADEMOISELLE GOUMPARD was at dinner with her purported Swiss uncle when the captain entered the dining room early in the evening. He returned her polite smile with an easy cordiality and seated himself to watch them covertly as he ate his dinner. He guessed that mademoiselle had heard every word that had been spoken in the general's room for he held no doubt that tiny wires secreted in the ornamental wood trimmings of the general's room carried every sound to the Goumpards. He guessed, too, that the general's secret orders had been hurriedly copied by the Goumpards and the originals surreptitiously returned to the general's table through the sliding panel before their absence could be detected.

M. Goumpard made rather a poor show of containing his excitement. He kept his shaggy head close to his dish; and while he strove to appear at ease and unconcerned, the captain readily detected the perceptible tremor of his hand each time he lifted it to his mouth. The experience of the past hour, the capture of orders of such staggering importance, must have tried nerves of steel.

But he saw that mademoiselle's poise was unshaken. Her mood seemed almost carefree and cheerful, with just a hint of triumph in her manner, the captain thought. As the Goumpards finished their dinner, he saw that her hand was steady as she deftly folded her napkin in her lap and laid it on the table carelessly. The gnarled old waiter took the napkin almost feverishly, made a show of gathering up a few dishes, and disappeared into the kitchen.

Captain Boyneton felt his own hand shake now as he lifted his fork in an effort at calm unconcern. In the folds of mademoiselle's napkin, he discerned, was a copy of the vital American orders. Of that he was not in doubt. The waiter need only pass the document along through a chain of Prussian secret agents and in a few hours it would be across the border in the hands of the German army.

Those orders outlined the most ambitious military project ever put on paper by the American high command. They launched the organization of a mailed drive into the upper Rhinelands from the Vosges fastness north and east of Belfort. Only American engineering skill, unlimited resources of men and money, could carry out such a plan. They rivalled the most daring military plans of Cæsar or Hannibal and surpassed in magnitude and sheer audacity any battle plans before devised in the red years of the World War. They brought the Germans to a new and terrible battle front, forced them to face an unexpected and formidable threat that, if it succeeded in overriding the barriers of frowning mountain ranges and deep valleys with its red folly, would lay Germany open at last to invading hosts. Success of such plans meant that they must be worked out in complete secrecy. The enemy must not suspect until it was too late.

Captain Boyneton's added duty of observing the Goumpards turned out to be a very simple and easy task during the next few days. The old Swiss uncle began taking refuge in his room, evidently unwilling to trust himself about; and mademoiselle was left to dine and go about alone. She left the hotel only for occasional exercise and the captain was puzzled by the fact that instead of avoiding him, she gave him every opportunity to accompany her.

During the next two evenings, as he walked with her after dinner, he made no mention of the war. He was aware that she must know that he had been assigned to watch her, must know that French suspicion had not been put to rest, and therefore she would know it at once if he attempted to draw her out.

Even now that she was revealed as an agent of the Prussian crown, he found it difficult to think of her as a dangerous enemy of his country whose discovery would call for a firing squad. When he strolled with her, she appeared to him only as a charming and helpless girl with a compelling appeal to his protective sense rather than his instincts for a war-time hanging. And he reassured himself that his only immediate duty was to see that she did not follow the general's reconnoissance work. Beyond that he need not concern himself, now.

On one other point he had assured himself. Mademoiselle's warning to him that he keep his own counsel had been, after all, a matter of scruple—perhaps of personal interest, rather than crass subterfuge. He found a grain of comfort in the reflection that she would not stoop to treachery of a personal sort. It helped him to reconcile his judgment of her character with her dangerous operations as an *espion*. The strange magic of patriotism might bend the finest of natures to the despised practices of espionage in the belief that it was a sacred duty to country, ordered by heaven itself. But it could not bend mademoiselle to petty treachery.

On the fourth evening thereafter, as they left the hotel together in the evening, Mademoiselle Goumpard was strangely sad and reflective. The captain was puzzled by her mood since he had expected to find her in a mood bordering on excitement. If his calculations were correct, tremendous developments were in the offing this evening, and of these mademoiselle must have some knowledge.

"You seem to have so little to occupy your time since the general came—and you told me you would be so busy," she confronted him, a vague accusation in her voice, as they strolled through a winding, deserted little Belfort street into which mademoiselle had led the way.

"I have found my duties particularly interesting and pleasant," he replied significantly.

"Searching for someone, perhaps, whose neck would fit a French hangman's noose," she rejoined calmly, the note of accusation more distinct.

He was startled by the audacity of her words.

"All things are fair in love and war," he laughed, clinging to an air of light unconcern.

"I have thought," she charged him bluntly, "that you suspected me at times of—of being an enemy of your country."

He stopped and stood staring at her in amazement at this breathless challenge. Mademoiselle's eyes met his frankly and fully.

"Would it not seem to you that my duty would require me to deal very—differently with you if I thought such a thing as that?" he demanded.

"Duty is a strange thing," she mused, pensively. "I suppose you would feel it your duty to hate me—or anyone—if you thought me one of what you call the enemy—and yet I could only despise anyone who did not hold duty above everything."

"I hold my duty sacred above all other things," he responded solemnly, adding in a lighter vein, "but I've never thought that war hates were anything very personal—and perhaps my own are very much like my commission as a captain, which reads—'for the duration of the emergency only'."

Mademoiselle's response was to stop suddenly and hold out her hand to him in farewell. He caught a vague ray of starlight reflected from the tell-tale ruby on her extended hand. "I shall not see you again," she announced firmly. "I am not returning to the hotel tonight."

"You are—stopping with—friends in Belfort?" he gasped, wholly unprepared for this.

"I am leaving Belfort in a few moments and shall not return again during the war," she said frankly.

Her eyes must have wondered at the expression as of relief that passed over the young officer's face. Then he stood looking at her passively for some moments.

"One month after the end of the war," he said when he had recovered himself, "I shall address a note to Mademoiselle Goumpard at Berne, Switzerland. May I hope that you will arrange to have my letter reach you—wherever you my be?"

"But—something might happen to change your mind—you might not care to write to Mademoiselle Goumpard—then," she said, so earnestly that he wondered at the indiscretion of her words.

"Nothing will change my mind," he said with decision. "I only hope that you will want to receive my letter then. Remember, always, the call of duty is above all things—you said as much as that yourself."

She looked at him quizzically a moment, and extended her hand again in parting. "I shall be watching for your letter. *Au revoir*," she said.

The captain stood looking after her until mademoiselle disappeared in the darkness of the winding little street in the heart of Belfort. Then he turned back to the dismal hotel and went to bed.

V

AN EXCITED pounding at his door awakened Captain Boyneton the next morning as the first light of dawn was creeping through the windows. He sensed instantly that the impatient hammering was not that of a mere orderly or junior officer. He hurried to the door only to face no less a person than the general's chief of staff. The colonel's face was coldly official and ominous.

"The general directs that you report to him instantly," the officer snapped, turning on his heel and walking off without acknowledging the captain's salute.

The general's room was filled with the more important members of his staff, and the general's mood was even more forbidding than that of the colonel, as Captain Boyneton entered and stood before him.

"You sent for me, sir?" the captain inquired.

For some moments the general continued to glare at him in searching, accusing silence. When at last he spoke, his words were low and contained, yet suggestive of passion held loosely in control, ready to be unleashed at any moment.

"Those elegant Swiss friends of yours, of whom you spoke so highly, are missing—bag and baggage. Do you find yourself able to enlighten us as to their whereabouts, since it was your job to watch them!" he demanded.

Captain Boyneton retained his easy poise. "No, sir, I do not know their present whereabouts," he replied.

"Five full combat divisions of German troops have appeared in our front, east of Belfort, during the night," the general proceeded, the omen of his voice rising. "Is the significance of that unfortunate fact clear to you, Captain?"

"Sir, it must mean that they have been hurried in there to keep us away from the upper Rhine," responded the captain, his face brightening unaccountably.

The general exchanged significant glances with his chief of staff. He held himself in check with a visible effort as he proceeded with the inquisition.

"Does it occur to you that there might be any connection between the arrival of those large German forces and the sudden disappearance of the Goumpards?"

The captain was unmoved. "It might suggest," he ventured, "that they were scared off by fear of being suspected of delivering your plans to the German high command."

"Exactly!" thundered the general, his restraint leaving him. "Since that is so clear to you now, I want your immediate explanation of why you didn't wake up to the danger before!" His voice filled with a sneering accusation. "I want to know how it was that you spent your time promenading about with that she-spy when you should have been really watching them. You might have found out, for example, that this room was wired with a dictaphone connection—that there was a secret sliding panel on that wall right over my official table!"

"Sir, I deeply regret—" began Captain Boyneton, flushing deeply and shifting in embarrassment.

"Don't regret!" exploded the general, his fury lashed by the maddening assurance of this witless junior officer. "This situation is too serious for mere regrets. In order to impress you with the seriousness of the situation, you may be under close arrest before you leave this room. What I want is explanation—if you have any—not your regrets!"

Captain Boyneton stiffened slightly but showed no fear.

"Sir, if the General will bear with me," he replied, "I wanted to express my sincere regrets that the General was not given all information of the plan at Belfort. I have merely carried out my secret orders, sir, to the best of my ability, as the General will understand when the morning courier arrives from headquarters, sir."

"What—what is the meaning of—of that amazing nonsense!" the general thundered, struck nevertheless by a sickly premonition. "Out with it!"

"Sir, my orders were to make certain that the General's secret field orders fell naturally into hands of the German spy system without in any way arousing their suspicion that we suspected the loss," Captain Boyneton explained. "Our Army is attacking at St. Mihiel this morning, sir, and these five German divisions that have been lured down here by bogus battle plans can never get back there to fight before our troops have nipped off the salient. So, sir, the Goumpards have really rendered an extraordinary service to the Allied cause—although I am convinced they had no intention of doing so."

Leaning Joe's DEPUTIES

A Novelette of Rawhide and Its Lazy, Humorous, Quick-Acting Sheriff

By

WILLIAM CORCORAN

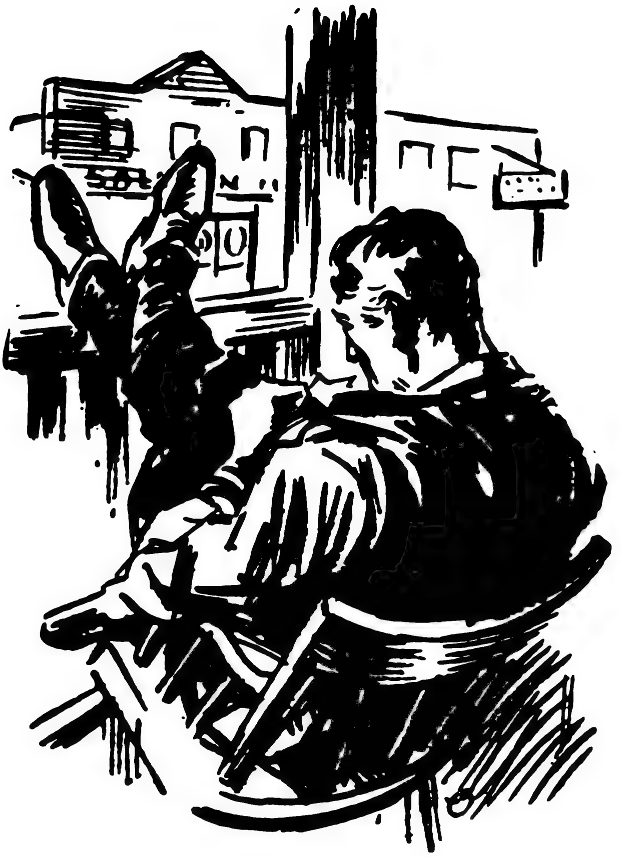
RAWHIDE was ill at ease. Rawhide was a town accustomed to noise, and the present unwonted quiet set the nerves of its populace considerably on edge. The community was attuned to the sounds of vigorous life: to the bawling of cattle down at the loading pens, the tinkling of a piano and stamping of feet at the Land o' Goshen, the roar of masculine laughter from the saloons, even to the sudden bursts of gunfire which occasionally joined the clamor. In the latter instance the folks listened without interrupting their immediate tasks. If a shrill and joyous whoop followed the shots they went right on with said tasks; if a momentary silence occurred they thrust their heads out the door to see if the corpse was anybody they knew.

Now, however, all was still. The cattle pens were deserted, though shipping time was imminent. The Land o' Goshen exuded no sounds of revelry by night or day. The saloons were bearing up under the depression, but the customers spoke softly and kept one eye on the outer door.

The one outstanding exception to the prevailing mood was Leaning Joe Tolliver. Joe got his name from his most marked habit. Just now Joe was sitting in a broad, wire reenforced chair which tilted comfortably against the shady wall behind him. The wall belonged to the small but well built frame building on which "Sheriff's Office" was painted in firm black letters. On Leaning Joe's left suspender, down low, was pinned a shiny star.

As an officer of the peace, Leaning Joe was as new and unspoiled as the star. His sole official act of any consequence so far had been his pronouncement of the oath of office. Nor did the responsibilities of his position seem to weigh heavily on Joe. His tanned, lantern jawed face was in repose, except for the obligations of a large chew of tobacco and the occasional precise expectoration into the dust beyond the sidewalk. His pale untroubled eyes stared at the window of the hardware shop across the street, where a shiny display of tools and implements held his interest.

Joe was no longer young, but his age was not easy to guess. It is probable that he did not know it himself. His face was tanned and lined by exposure. His long, indolent body was wiry and strong, and his large hands were exceptionally well formed. They looked very capable and



deft, those hands; and in many ways, indeed, they were.

The screen door of the hardware shop opened and closed again with a bang. Henry Van Horn, proprietor, stood on the little porch and looked at Joe. His scrutiny displayed an abiding interest. It was even a glare.

Leaning Joe ignored the man of business, but Henry crossed the street and addressed him directly. "You looka here, Joe Tolliver," he declared. "All you done these past three days is sit in that chair and look at my window. Is they anything wrong with it?"

Joe inclined his head slightly forward, and spat between Henry's widespread feet. Then he turned a mild regard on the hardware man. Henry Van Horn was long—not tall, but long. The characteristic described his thin body, and likewise prevailed in his thin, sallow features. He had stiff black hair and small dark eyes. He was in shirt sleeves and suspenders.

"No," replied Leaning Joe in all seriousness, "not that I knows of they ain't anything wrong with your window."

"Well then, what in condemnation you doing sitting there on county time? You ain't done a lick of anything to earn your pay since that dinged fool election put you in office."

Leaning Joe stared at Henry in mild wonder. He shoved back his old brown hat and scratched his head. Evidently Henry Van Horn was all worked up about something, but for the life of him Leaning Joe failed to understand why.

"Anything been happening I ain't heard about, Henry?" Joe asked.

"Not a dang thing!"

Joe grinned slowly, his wide mouth spreading in comfortable good nature. "Then they ain't nothing to worry about."

"Worry! With a sheriff that ain't got sense enough to come in out of the rain!"

"Ain't been any rain in two years," Joe assured him.

"Oh, my sacred aunt!" exploded Henry. "Who in condemnation ever thought of electing you sheriff?"

Joe was troubled. "Why, the voters of this here county, Henry."

"The more fools they! Joe, you ain't even appointed your deputies yet. You ain't done anything. The whole country's scared to death. Here we got a range war ready to bust and you sit here chew-ing tobacco all day. What have you done about the trouble between Magpie Hanks and John Borden? Nothing! And their two outfits is primed for killing each other off."

"Well, they ain't started yet, Henry. Nothing I can do about it."

Henry Van Horn threw up his hands and stalked across the street. In the dust of the road he turned and delivered a parting shot. "You wait. By gosh, you wait. When them Hell on Wheels and Dixie outfits gets to shooting each other up, this here county is going to find what kind of sheriff it elected. And don't you come to me then, Joe Tolliver; you'll get no help from me. I was again you from the start and I'll be again you till this dang county comes to its senses and picks a real sheriff."

Joe watched him go, amazement on his face. No one had been more surprised at the result of the election than Leaning Joe. He had not offered himself for the job, had never thought of running for office at all, and had first heard of his success when a body of riders visited him at his sod house up country and brought him to town in rather dazed condition to receive the acclaim of the populace. That had been a remarkable day. Half the town had gotten wildly drunk and had escorted Joe up and down the main street in a hilarious parade. Joe himself had very nearly become drunk and the various speeches he made were none too clearly remembered. It seemed every man he knew was there, and a lot he didn't know. Now it came as a shock to learn that his election was not unanimous, at least by one vote. Joe shook his head, wondering what in tarnation was the matter with Henry Van Horn.

AT THAT moment from a side door of a saloon along the street a man emerged. He wore the white apron of a bartender, and on his face was a worried look. He glanced in Joe's direction, and making up his mind came along the plank sidewalk at a hurried gait.

"Joe," he began immediately he arrived before the sheriff, "they's trouble due to bust loose up in my place. They's a fellow there says he is going to shoot up my bar. He's a stranger and I think he means what he says."

Leaning Joe gazed sideways at the harassed barkeep. "Well, you going to let him?"

"Joe, he's bad. I'm telling you, he's bad. I ain't no gunslinger. You got to do something."

Leaning Joe considered. He spat into the dust and rose leisurely. "All right," he said. "I'll see what I can do."

"You'll be right up?"

"Yep. You run along."

The barkeep ran along. Joe followed, taking his time, and when he pushed open the doors of the dingy saloon whence the summons led him, the white aproned figure once more presided behind the bar.

Before the bar a single patron leaned against the mahogany. He was a big man with several weeks' growth of bristle on his face. He looked hard and acted hard. He wore the clothes of a rider and two gun belts circled his wrist. He was half drunk and had been haranguing the dozen or so other patrons of the place in sneering fashion. Now he studied Leaning Joe with an ugly leer.

"Come on in, Bean Pole," he invited. "I crave more audience."

Leaning Joe grinned in amiable fashion and walked to the bar. "Howdy, stranger," he said agreeably. "Have a drink?"

The bully regarded the sheriff in half drunken scorn. "Drink? I'll have six drinks. I ain't no piker."

The barkeep, more worried than ever, filled two glasses. The bully promptly dashed off one of them, and as Joe raised the other, lifted the second glass from Joe's fingers and downed that also. Joe looked surprised and pained.

"That was my drink, fellow," he protested.

The bully laughed with crude enjoyment. "Your drink! Nobody drinks here unless I make 'em."

Leaning Joe apparently could not quite understand. "Stranger, I don't need nobody to make me drink," he assured the fellow. "I can drink six men under the table. I can drink you blind your own self."

"Me?" cried the bully. "You outdrink me! Why, you—! Bean Pole, I can outdrink, outshoot, outfight and outcuss seven men and a catamount! I'm so hard a bobcat wore out his claws on me one night and I never woke up. Where I come from we chew lead for tobacco and spit holes in two inch planks!"

Joe looked unimpressed. "You just said," he suggested, "you could shoot. I bet right here you couldn't hit a barn door if you was inside it."

"What?" roared the bully. "I couldn't! Lemme show you some shooting. Just lemme show you." He took out a huge Colt .45, an enormous weapon with a seven and a half inch barrel, and he waved it about.

"Come on outside," invited Joe.

The bully headed for the door, aflame with the desire of humbling Joe and impressing upon the whole community his terrifying skill.

They were alone on the street. The two men walked out on the sidewalk. Joe continued a few steps aside to the alley between the saloon and the adjoining building. There he picked up a tin can.

"Now you hit that tin can," Joe suggested, and he tossed it several yards along the street.

The bully brought up his gun for a flashing, off hand shot. But when his gun exploded, the tin can was three feet from its original resting place, and his bullet made a spurt of dust in the road. Leaning Joe, his own gun in his hand by a draw that was deft and casual, the muzzle smoking from that amazingly quick shot, grinned at the bully. "Try her again, fellow," he invited.

The bully stared at the can, stared at Joe and at his gun. Then, grimly, he eyed the can again and brought down his long barreled Colt to annihilate the target. But again Joe shot a fraction of a second before him, seemingly without even looking at the tin can, and the bully's slug tore into the dust once more.

"Hell!" exclaimed the bully. "You doing that a-purpose?" he demanded of Joe.

"Sure!" Leaning Joe grinned in the most friendly fashion. "Look." And he sped three shots after the bounding tin can, three explosions that tripped one after the other within a single second. Then he pointed the gun at the bully. "There's one cartridge left in this, stranger. I want to borrow both your guns a moment."

The bully studied Joe's face for a space while neither moved. However much liquor the stranger may have consumed, none of it influenced his judgment now. He held out the gun in his hand as though it was hot and uncomfortable. The weapon remaining in his belt Joe abstracted with a deft move.

"I ain't precisely what you might call a expert shot," Joe apologized. "Not around here. Lots of fellows can shoot rings around me." Meantime he plugged two fresh shells in place of the two used by the stranger, and with the guns filled, and his own thrust in his belt, he faced the tin can. It was now some yards further away.

For a brief second he stood motionless. Then slowly his face turned and smiled at the awed bully. A shot exploded. The tin can leaped. Another shot. Again the can jumped. And Joe continued to smile into the stranger's face. It was a spectacular trick, one not too difficult for an expert to master, but miraculous to anyone seeing it the first time.

Joe faced the can again. And with the air of one finishing a job carelessly, he emptied both guns at the battered cylinder with a rattle of perfect shots. Then he handed the weapons to the bully.

"That's just plain shooting in this town, fellow," he said. "Between you and me, if I was you I'd get on my horse and ride before somebody hears you boasting."

The bully took the two guns and blinked at Leaning Joe. Very rapidly indeed he was sobering up. "Who are you?" he inquired.

"I'm the sheriff around here," replied Joe.

The bully looked at his weapons, much as though they held some secret potency he had never suspected. Then he thrust them hurriedly in their holsters, turned and made his way to a horse standing at the hitch rail, nervous and wall-eyed from the shooting. He mounted, jerking on the bit to quiet the animal, and with one last mystified glance at Leaning Joe, he set off down the street at a gallop. He vanished out of town in a trail of rising dust. And Rawhide to this day has never seen him again.

IT WAS only half an hour later that Leaning Joe received another visitor. Peaceful John Borden, owner of the DX brand, commonly known as the "Dixie," dropped into the office on a very particular errand. He found Joe in a swivel chair, his high heels propped up on the desk before him. The sheriff was fully at his ease, and he contemplated a view of Niagara Falls on a lithographed calendar on the wall with placid interest.

Peaceful John filled the doorway. He was a man of great bulk, of barrel chest and hamlike shoulders. His blue eyes were said to reflect gentle kindness when all was at peace with John Borden, but this was accepted on hearsay mostly, for rarely was anything at peace with Peaceful John. He had a faculty for starting trouble, finding trouble, bumping into it and finishing it. He wore a long pale mustache and a look of habitual suspicion.

"Here you, Joe Tolliver," the big cattleman rumbled, "this the best you can find to do since we elected you sheriff?"

Leaning Joe drew his gaze with some reluctance from the calendar. "Howdy, John," he greeted. After a brief and calm eyed study of his visitor he asked, "What in time is getting into you all anyway? I ain't never had so many people pesticating around since that day some dang fool said them rocks back of my cabin had gold in them."

"What's getting into me?" repeated Peaceful John. "Why, that you're a hell of a sheriff for this county to have, that's what. You ain't no more fitten to be sheriff than my daughter."

Joe spat into the sand box in the corner. "You go bring in some sheriffing to be done, and I'll do it, John," he retorted, unmoved. "Besides, you helped elect me."

Borden laughed, with the coarse laughter of a man who pretends to be amused much more than he actually is. "I helped, all right. I elected you. You know why? Because it was a deadlock between my candidate and the fellow that thief Magpie Hanks had running for him. The last day my foreman, Walt Tabor, suggests I switch to you. If the dang county couldn't tell the difference between an honest man and a crook we'd give them a plumb fool. That's how I elected you. And I put one over on Magpie Hanks, too."

Leaning Joe was staring at the colored picture of Niagara Falls on the wall again. This required thought. No sign of surprise or consternation crossed his lean face. Peaceful John glowered belligerently at him for a moment, then sat down heavily on a chair.

"I come here on important business," he continued.

"You got some sheriffing after all, John?"

"No," snorted the cattleman. "When I got any sheriffing to do I'll probably do it myself. And should I want an officer I want a regular one. That's what I come for."

Joe shook his head with finality and stretched out in the chair a little further. "Ain't a sheriff closer than a hundred miles more regular than I am, John. It's all writ out legal and affydavied and everything."

"Listen here," said Peaceful John. "You got to appoint two deputies. You picked them yet?"

"No. Ain't nobody been around to apply."

"Well. I'm sending in my foreman Walt Tabor, and I want you should appoint him deputy."

"That so?"

"Yeh. You swear him in right off, you hear? Then you see you keep sitting in that chair a-looking at the pictures on the wall the rest of your term. You hear that too?"

"Folks will be kicking I ain't earning my salary, John."

"You just figure you're getting paid to keep out of things, Joe Tolliver. I'll take care of folks. And my foreman Walt Tabor will take care of this sheriff business."

Peaceful John rose. He gave one long pale mustache a hard pull. "Dang fool notion anyway, electing you." He turned to stalk out the door.

In the entrance however he halted. More properly, he froze. On the sidewalk, about to enter, stood a man approximately half Borden's size, and the two stared at each other. Balefully they glared, while in the office Leaning Joe brought his heels down softly.

Then Peaceful John Borden snorted and stepped out of the doorway. Walking almost daintily he passed the little man and mounted his horse at the rail. The little man turned slowly and watched the big cattleman until he was some distance down the street. His sharp black eyes snapped with the ardor of immediate battle. As he whirled and entered the office there was a faint air of disappointment on him.

Now the little man, too, viewed the new

sheriff with intolerant disgust. He found Leaning Joe exactly as his predecessor had come upon him, heels elevated, soft gaze fixed on the fascinating view of Niagara Falls. Henry Hanks, known occasionally as Magpie, and owner of the H Circle or "Hell on Wheels" brand, was a man of irascible temperament.

"WHAT the ding blasted tarantulas you doing in that chair, Joe Tolliver?" he demanded with some heat. "I ain't seen you once since you was elected but you been sitting in a chair looking at something."

"Howdy, Magpie," drawled Joe. "My gosh, don't you fellows do anything else but criticizing your sheriff?"

The little man bristled and his eyes flashed. "Don't you go using that name, you hear? I been advertising I'd shoot the next man called me that, and I don't give a skyhooting hang if he's sheriff or what!"

Joe expressed mild surprise. "I didn't mean no offense, Henry Hanks."

"No? You better not. What was that big bluffer just doing in here?"

"The same thing you and half the dang county's been doing this past three days. There ain't been as much peace and quiet around these parts since the Bitter Mountain gold rush ten years ago when the whole town was deserted, and I'll be doggoned if they ain't holding me responsible for it some way. I don't know what's got into you all. Pretty soon I'll have to go out and shoot a fellow my own self, and see if maybe it won't stop all this here criticizing and complaining."

"Was John Borden in here complaining?" demanded Henry Hanks.

"Complaining ain't the word. It was downright slander and libel, and I bet you if I looked it up in the statutes I could arrest him for contempt of court or something."

The little man's irascible temper softened at this news. He chuckled with malicious delight. "Suffering bobcats, but I sure put one over on John Borden that time," he exclaimed. He chuckled some more.

"How? By electing me?" asked Joe with a sigh of long suffering resignation.

"You're everlasting tooting I did!"

"I thought so."

Magpie Hanks grinned. "I suppose he wanted to take you apart for defeating his gun toting candidate, eh? He would. I know him. Well, this time I fooled him." The little rancher surveyed the new sheriff tolerantly. "Don't you get any fool notions that you was elected on your merits, Leaning Joe. I elected you. My foreman, Dally Lowman, give me the idea the last day, when it looked like neither of the regular candidates could lick the other. If this halfwitted county couldn't chose between a loud mouthed bully and a real officer, why we'd give them a plumb bonehead. You hear that, Joe Tolliver?" he barked suddenly, as though anticipating any resentment on Joe's part at such frankness. "I elected you my own self, and you're going to do as I say."

"You know more about it than I do, Magpie," said Joe dubiously.

"You're dang tooting—" began the little rancher, then switched off into, "You call me that name again, Joe Tolliver, and I'll bend this six-shooter around your head! You hear me?"

Joe was alarmed. "Henry, they can hear you down by the railroad tracks. I only called you Magpie because—"

"Never mind because anything! I'm telling you, if I ever hear that everlasting name again—!"

"All right, Henry. I told you it didn't mean nothing, except it sorty fits you like."

Henry choked, and his face grew red to an alarming degree. When he recovered he gave a single wordless snort in the traditional manner of a grampus and walked to the door. There he turned and delivered a final restrained message.

"By all the everlasting purple faced horned toads, I'm getting out of here while I can hold myself back. I'm sending my foreman Dally Lowman in to you, and I want you to deputize him. You hear me? You make him your deputy and do what he tells you—and keep your idiotic face closed for the rest of your term."

Leaning Joe watched him depart with a look of profound mystification while he slowly scratched his head in the vicinity of his right ear. Apparently it was all too much for Joe. He elevated the worn boot heels to the edge of the desk and resumed his study of Niagara Falls.

When the town heard the news it shivered a bit in anticipation, but took a few moments off to guffaw roundly at the joke. Men at the bars, after making sure who was within hearing distance, slapped their fellows on the back and bent double with laughter. They did not know the full details but it was a gorgeous story.

The town had watched, during the past months, the growth of a bloodthirsty feud between the Borden and Hanks outfits. The two men had once been friends, and their ranges, lying side by side, grazed the largest herds in the country. What started the difficulty between them was hard to determine; they were close mouthed about some things and asked neither sympathy nor advice in their troubles. Little points of friction, quick suspicions and hot tempers: these may have started the affair. It progressed with loud threats and minor, unexplained depredations, flourished with several clashes between the outfits, including a shooting or two, and promised to wind up in an outright war that would end everything—including two crack cow outfits. Each accused the other of theft, arson, mayhem, assault with intent to kill and general orneryness. It is no wonder that as bad blood grew stronger between them some of the charges should become true.

But what caused the town folk to chortle in the midst of their apprehension was the inevitable result of electing old Leaning Joe Tolliver sheriff. Joe had gone and done what no sane officer would dare think of doing, something so reckless as to be practically farcical. He had chosen for his deputies the two men whose hate for each other boiled over on sight, the two biggest troublemakers in the county!

Watchful observers had seen them ride into town—at different hours, by lucky chance—and enter the sheriff's office. They had departed again shortly after and each man had worn on his vest a nickeled deputy's badge.

THE Saturday night following the double appointment, Peaceful John Borden rode into town in company with his deputy-foreman Walt Tabor and a number of his riders. The small cavalcade cantered down the center of the street and the badge on Walt Tabor's vest gleamed in the dusk. It was a little parade of force whereby Peaceful John made clear to all who was going to boss the county from there on. Soon it broke up and the riders scattered. But Walt Tabor, his lean saturnine figure treading the loose plank sidewalk softly, stalked up and down as though in search of business.

Nobody looking for trouble in Rawhide on a Saturday night ever had long to wait. And even in this time of peace Walt Tabor was soon rewarded, and rewarded to his fullest desire, for his victim was a Hell On Wheels rider.

Walt Tabor, among other things, had been observing the doors of the Golden Spur saloon at the north end of the town. These doors opened at length, and a man came out. His manner of departure was unusual, being a mode of locomotion obviously involuntary which propelled him on his right ear into the road. He sat there for a moment and dazedly picked himself up. He cursed, clenched his fists and swung fiercely. There was nothing to swing at, and he measured his length in the dust a second time. At this point Walt Tabor arrived.

"Hold on," he commanded. "What's coming off here."

The fellow squirmed in Tabor's grasp and attempted vainly to repeat his haymaker. He was a fair sized, rather frowzy specimen, possibly a ranch laborer.

"Lemme at him!" he breathed hoarsely. "Just lemme at him!"

"Let you at who?" demaded Tabor.

"Son of a camel inside. Lemme at him."

The doors opened again. Walt, somewhat preoccupied at the moment, did not observe the tall, angular man who stood in the doorway observing the spectacle. Then the newcomer spoke.

"Paste him one for me, Pie Face!" he encouraged. "Whoops!"

Tabor turned. He saw the man, recognized him as the Magpie Hanks' rider, Dave Markey.

"That's the cockeyed gopher!" roared the frowzy one. "He called me Pie Face. I'll tear a leg offem!"

"Who did you say to paste who?" asked Tabor of the cowboy on the sidewalk.

"Him," replied the Hanks' rider. "Pie Face."

The explanation was too indefinite for Tabor. "What about him?" he insisted on knowing. He was much too anxious to get to the point by far, for the frowzy one, finding an opportunity, forgot his feud with the cowboy and joyfully pasted Walt Tabor instead.

The foreman snarled an oath and clipped the fellow a neat blow behind the left ear. It ended the dispute right there. The fellow subsided into the dust and lay without moving.

Tabor stepped on the sidewalk. "What was that again?" he demanded of the cowboy.

"Aw, hell!" complained the rider. "You went and spoiled the fun!"

"You're under arrest," snapped Tabor. "You're drunk."

"Who says I'm drunk? Just tell me who says I'm drunk." The cowboy swayed slightly, but his voice was loud and firm.

"Get going. Up to the jail."

The cowboy squinted at Tabor, sighed and shook his head with regret, and his fist swung abruptly from the vicinity of his right knee. Tabor recoiled from it, but there was sufficient force to send the foreman sprawling beside the peaceful figure in the road.

"Come on, all you Dixie rannies!" bellowed the Hell on Wheels partisan. "Come and meet a man!"

Tabor came. He sprang viciously from the dust, leaped on the sidewalk, and darted in. The Hanks' man subsided with a startled gasp and crumpled to the boards. A thin line of blood trailed down across his forehead. Tabor, dark eyes burning, thrust back into his holster the gun whose barrel had laid the cowboy low. Then he bent down and hoisted the limp body over his shoulder. Heavily he proceeded up the street and into the sheriff's office before the jail.

Later that evening the Hell on Wheels outfit arrived in town. They came in force, and walked their horses along the street much as the Dixie men had done. Walt Tabor was nowhere in sight, as observers noticed, and though a few Dixie men looked on in mocking silence the darkness concealed from them the badge that Dally Lowman wore. This parade, too, broke up shortly, and the whole crowd, with one exception, pushed through the doors of The Golden Spur saloon. The one exception was Dally Lowman, and he went directly to the jail.

The sheriff's office, illuminated by a bracket lamp on the wall, was empty, but the door to the jail behind was open. Dally Lowman walked through the door, and found Leaning Joe in amiable conversation with a prisoner. The prisoner, the only civic guest at that moment, occupied one of the cells which faced each other in pairs across the tiny corridor—cells made entirely of steel bars, both front and side walls. He sat on the cot, holding his bandaged head in his hands.

Dally peered curiously into the cell. "Got a customer?"

"Howdy, Dally," said Joe. "Yep. First prisoner."

Dally looked again. "Hell!" he exclaimed. "Dave Markey. What the devil you doing in there?"

Dave looked up and eyed his big bodied, hard faced blond foreman with the gaze of one who has been crushed. "Damn' if I know," he said. "Something hit me. I think I was fighting a fellow. I called him Pie Face."

Dally Lowman's blue eyes clouded and his heavy jaw grew hard. "How come you got arrested? That's what I want to know. Joe, did you lock up Dave?"

Leaning Joe, hands in pockets, one shoulder seeking the support of the side wall, spat and hunched his shoulders. "Nope. Found him here after I got back from supper. He was drunk. Some other fellow brought him in."

"Give me the key to that cell," barked Dally Lowman. "If there's any arresting going on around here, *I'm* going to do it."

"Key's hanging on the wall in the office," said Joe.

It was—hanging where anybody sufficiently interested could take it and release a favored prisoner. Dally stood in the office and expressed his opinion of such proceedings.

"You plumb idiot!" he roared. "Is that the place to leave this key?"

Joe glanced into the office. "Oh, I ain't had to worry about any prisoners. I don't want any either; you got to feed them."

Dally stalked in and unlocked the cell door. "Beat it," he ordered the cowboy. "The gang is down at the Spur. And keep out of trouble."

"I will," said Dave, and made his way out clinging to his throbbing head.

Dally Lowman turned to Joe. "That's all right for this time, but when I come around again I don't crave to find any more H Circle boys in this jail. Fill the dratted place to the roof with the Dixie gang, if you want; but don't forget what I said." He glowered, and walked out to the sidewalk. There, after a brief survey of the street, he strode arrogantly to the Golden Spur saloon.

DEPUTY Walt Tabor's ambitions were by no means satisfied with his conquest of Dave Markey. The street was crowded with cowboys, miners, railroaders and migrating laborers, and a sudden renascence of joy came over the town; yet the dark visaged Walt stalked dourly along the sidewalk, a sinister minion of the law. Particularly he hovered near the Golden Spur. It was perhaps odd that he came to no encounter with Dally Lowman, but if anyone observed this phenomenon, it was with satisfaction that the inevitable climax was so dramatically delayed.

Soon a rider emerged from the Golden Spur, to stand for a moment on the porch while he gathered himself together. He shook himself, adjusted his belt with the air of one handling a new and puzzling contrivance, set his hat straight on his head; and stepped out, making his way up the street. He walked with considerable dignity, exercising care that he should not collide with the numerous passersby, and his eyes expressed a beatific if glassy calm. In a word, he was beautifully lit.

Walt Tabor followed him, gimlet stare boring into the fellow's back. Observers along the way halted, watched, and followed, to see what would happen.

The puncher stopped before a Chinese restaurant, and in the light from the window, extracted a paper sack of long cut from his pocket and drew forth a chew. He thrust it into a capacious mouth, and then proceeded on his way. Every detail of these acts Walt Tabor followed closely.

They went past a couple of saloons, a harness shop, the blacksmith's, and then, in front of a particularly well lighted dancehall, the puncher halted again, Tabor and the sizable train of observers coming to a stop with him. He attained a fair state of balance, aimed, and spat a generous overflow of tobacco juice before him at a crack in the boards. His aim was imperfect, but he worried no whit. Grinning in vacant fashion, he was about to take up his course again. But the impulse died perforce when a heavy hand fell on his shoulder and yanked him about.

"Hey!" he exclaimed. "What the hell!"

Walt Tabor fixed the fellow with his gimlet gaze. "You're under arrest."

"Me? Whaffor?"

"You're under arrest," repeated Walt.

"I ain't," denied the puncher with indignation. "I'm solely under starry skies. Solely under majestic and bejeweled dome of night."

"Shut up. You're going to jail. You spit on the sidewalk. That's a misdemeanor by the statutes."

The cowboy accepted not a word of the charge. Striking a dignified pose, with one hand on his chest, he enlightened the deputy as to his status. "Yon starry firm'-ment, whish baffles man in his attempt to plumb its miseries — mysteries — alone stands between me and the topmos' reaches of th' night. Under arres', you says? Iggerance! Oh, the iggerance of mortal man!"

"You spit on the sidewalk," said Walt Tabor. "Come on. Git!" He grasped an elbow of the puncher and began marching him farther along toward the little jail. The fellow protested, but vainly. His protest became a pained regret for the uneducated state of the deputy, and all the way to the jail he apostrophized this sad state in loud and eloquent language. The train of followers pressed close and were considerably edified, to judge from the attentive merriment. When the pair disappeared in the jail door, the crowd gathered outside and continued to listen. The language was still audible.

Leaning Joe brought his boots down as Tabor entered, and he gazed on the deputy's second prisoner with mild interest.

"Lock this fellow up," snapped Tabor. "He's charged with spitting on the sidewalk, insulting an officer, and resisting arrest, all under the statutes."

"There!" exclaimed the puncher dramatically. "There! Iggerance!"

"Will you shut up?" inquired Tabor, his face one inch from that of the cowboy.

"My gosh, he's lit," remarked Leaning Joe. "The Dude is the worst feller for big words when he gets lit."

"Put him away," demanded Tabor.

"Sure," agreed Joe. He took the puncher by the arm. "Come on, Dude. Be nice and come on peaceable." The Dude cast a sorrowful glance at Joe and complied with his request. But as he accompanied the sheriff into the rear section of the building he resumed his harangue anent the ignorance of Walt Tabor.

Walt glowered for a second after him, and turned and stalked out of the office. The crowd scattered before him.

Meantime, Dally Lowman had been busy. As previously remarked, he somehow managed to escape direct contact with his brother officer. The crowds were thick, so neither was conspicuous; and Dally haunted the other end of the town, where the Dixie men foregathered.

Like Tabor, he was looking for trouble. He was not so quick in finding it, but made up for the delay in concentrated action. As he stood by a hitch rail in front of a darkened, empty store, his keen eyes surveying all about him under fair but bushy brows, there came to his ears a sudden fusillade of shots from a dingy little saloon across the street. A series of whoops, denoting both satisfaction and a degree of inebriety, followed. Dally knew the place to be a resort of the Dixie boys, and he broke into a run for the saloon doors.

As Dally burst through them, a second burst of shots exploded in the room. One of the bullets, catching both upraised brim and crown of his Stetson, turned it askew on his head. A couple more smacked into the woodwork beside his ear. Dally went into a crouch which reduced him to about half size, and he had both guns out threatening the occupants of the room.

"Don't shoot him, boys!" cried a voice. "He don't know no better."

"Drop them guns!" barked Dally.

"You first, professor," insisted a puncher who stood in the middle of the floor, smoking guns in hands. "We're hell for politeness, we are. You first."

There were three of them, all in a mood of exultation and joy. The other patrons crowded behind tables and chairs, trying their best to demonstrate that solid cover is the better part of discretion. The bartender was nowhere in sight.

"Shoot if you must that old fat head—" began the first cowboy.

"But spare his ears and nose and dimpled chin! Whoopee!" yelled the second, and he half raised his six-shooter as if to follow his own admonition.

Dally's reply was not in words. He began shooting. The barking of the two Colt .45's thundered in the low ceilinged room, and the atmosphere became hazy with smoke. For three seconds the place was a shambles. Stark silence followed. The smoke rolled and thinned. And revealed erect in the center of the room were the three Dixie punchers, their empty hands held high aloft, their eyes staring out of their heads.

A face rose from behind the bar, pale and beaded with sweat, and surveyed the scene. "My God!" the face spoke. "He missed every shot!"

However, the three were amenable to authority after that. Dally Lowman gathered their guns from the floor and herded them outside and down the street. They entered the jail in single file, while the curious who gathered nearby watched in wonder.

Dally, entering the outer office at the heels of the three, found Leaning Joe standing in the center of the floor, cocking an ear toward the inner cells. From within an unremitting flow of oratory poured forth. It was concerned with the low state of civilization in Rawhide and adjoining parts, and was punctuated with elegant references to starry firmaments, the twinkling diamonds on night's sable brow, and the immeasurability of space: and as they listened, came to a ringing close.

"That's the first time he stopped talking in twenty minutes," said Leaning Joe in awe. "That fellow knows more words than Noah Webster!"

"The Dude!" exclaimed Dally Lowman. "What the hell? You got him locked up?"

"No," said Joe. "He ain't locked up. He won't come out."

Dally walked through to the cells, and found the Dude, one of the most eccentric cow hands on the range, standing in the jail corridor. He was braced against a chair with one hand, the other waved a bottle of whisky in emphasis of his recent remarks.

"What the devil you doing here?" demanded Dally.

The puncher reared in dignity and frowned on the foreman. It took some effort for his eyes to focus on the man who broke in so rudely on his performance. "It's Dally Lowman," he announced. Waving the bottle anew, he expanded and burst forth, "Gen'lemen! I wish to introduce one whose fame is known to you all through his splend'd deeds far better than through my humbl' worse—words. He stan's before you—"

Dally took the bottle from the Dude's uncertain grasp and roared, "Shut your fool mouth, you idiot!"

"Consider the idiot," the Dude considered. "He toils not, neither does he stop a hole to keep the wind away, yet to this end cometh all men!"

Dally put down the bottle. He seized the Dude, turned him about, and grasping him by neck and trousers, rushed him out of the corridor, through the office and into the street. There the Dude barely averted a fall into the dust when Dally released him, and after attaining a passable balance, stepped up on the sidewalk. He struck an attitude and forthwith began haranguing the crowd which was gathered in the vicinity of the jail.

"Oh, my God!" groaned Dally, back in the office. He invoked the Deity, the devil, and a few lesser beings. "Lock these fellows up," he ordered Leaning Joe. "I got to take this cowboy down to the livery hay loft and put him to bed."

"Jest as you say," agreed Joe. He grinned at the three prisoners. "Come on, boys."

IT WAS not ten minutes later that the quiet of the jail and office was again disturbed. Sounds of wrath and conflict floated in on the night from the street, at first afar, and then quite near, until it was at the very door of the office.

Deputy Sheriff Walt Tabor was having difficulties, but he forced the raging cowboy he grasped through the door before him, and entered himself. He was in a bad way. Both of them were in a bad way. The prisoner, a red-headed young fellow of middle size, had a damaged nose, a swollen lip, and his clothes were ripped and disheveled. The officer wore a black eye, which promised with a little ripening to become a magnificent shiner. His fine Stetson was missing and his hair was tossed. He was in a venomous mood.

"I'll be a hamstrung son of a buffalo," raged the red-headed puncher, "if any crook of a deputy sheriff can lock me up!"

"You're being locked up now," gritted Walt Tabor.

"Who says I am?" demanded the red-head. "Try and do it. Try and do it, I tell you!"

The officer gazed at his prisoner in an excess of provocation. "What do you want me to do; hang you, to prove it? Get in there." He shoved the red-head inside to the cells. The red-head resisted, but superior force sent him headlong. He crashed against a cell door, and promptly, the door being unlocked, disappeared inside on his ear.

Walt Tabor stalked into the jail after him. He stopped in the middle of the floor and stared. "What the hell?" he demanded.

In an adjoining cell, on a packing box set up in their midst, Leaning Joe and the three Dixie prisoners were playing poker. A pile of money occupied the center of the board, and intense concentration was on every face as they studied their hands and considered the possibility of winning that sizable pot. The cell door was closed and securely locked.

"What the hell?" repeated Walt Tabor.

"Wait a minute, can't you?" exclaimed one of the punchers. He thumbed his cards and stared at the others with intense gaze.

For a moment Walt Tabor remained silent, quite out of words. Then he whirled about and looked in the other cells. They were all empty, with the exception of the one in which the redhead sat on the floor with a lugubrious expression, rubbing his head.

Walt Tabor let out a roar. "Where's them prisoners? Hellfire and damnation! Joe Tolliver, where's them prisoners?"

"They escaped," replied Joe. "Raise you five dollars."

"Five and two dollars more."

"Five and two and call."

"I'm out."

"Two and—" Joe hesitated. "Nemmind, I'll call too."

Walt Tabor stood before the door of the cell in which the poker game was in progress and roared his wrath. His face was red and swollen with emotion. He seized the bars to open the door, but the door was locked. So he took to shaking the bars, while the four inside breathlessly counted out the final bets and revealed their hands.

At this moment the red-head was taken

with a brilliant idea, and in response to it, jumped to his feet and dashed out of the jail at full speed. Walt Tabor turned in time to see his heels vanishing through the exit. With a bellow he set out in pursuit.

In a minute he was back. The redhead lay over his shoulder, hands and feet hanging limply, and on his face was an expression of deep repose. Grimly Tabor dumped him on the cot of the cell he had so briefly occupied. Then he turned his attention to Leaning Joe.

The sheriff stood in the alley between the cell rows, his brows knit in sober effort as he counted a fistful of money. The three cowboys stood inside the cell watching him with woebegone expressions.

"For the last time, Joe Tolliver," said Walt, '"where's them two Hell on Wheels fellows?"

"They escaped, I told you," Joe told him again.

"Escaped, me eye! What's these three Dixie boys doing in here?"

"We was arrested, Walt," explained one of the three.

"Holy sassefras! Arrested?"

"Yeah. Dally Lowman arrested us."

"How come he can arrest anybody; tell me that?"

The cowboy looked dubious. "He's a deputy, like you are, Walt. He's got a badge and all."

Walt Tabor's eyes narrowed menacingly. His voice was soft and silky as he addressed himself to Leaning Joe once more. "Mr. Sheriff, will you kindly explain how come Dally Lowman wears a deputy's badge?"

Leaning Joe shrugged his denial of responsibility for the odd circumstances. "Magpie Hanks insisted I should make him a depity, Walt. That's all they is to it."

Walt Tabor clutched at his hair. "Well, I'll be a cockeyed cow wrastler on skids!" He turned and walked up and down the cell corridor. "Holy rattlesnakes! Insisted, no less. After me telling you—!"

"Oh, he was real insistent, Walt. You don't know. He'd have been real mad if I didn't."

Walt turned on the three cowboys. "Get out of here!" he snapped. "You let anybody arrest you again and I'll shoot you full of holes. Get out!"

They got.

For the next few minutes the jail was sulphurous with language, strange and outlandish, as Walt Tabor expressed his opinion of Joe, the job, his official acts, and various related matters. Joe, having finished counting his poker winnings, pocketed them and watched Walt thereafter in open admiration. Leaning Joe, not being a fluent person, always had admired men with a command of language.

But Walt had not reached his end of his discourse when the noise of several people crowding through the street door into the office brought him to an abrupt halt. Both he and Leaning Joe stared through the passage into the office.

"You can't arrest us!" cried a valiant voice. It belonged to one of the recently departed trio. "It's again the law!"

"I'll run you smack again the law, young fellow. I'm going to find out how you got out of here. Get back into that jail."

"We won't!" the three yelled together. But Dally Lowman's hands swooped and clutched at the two guns he wore. The three punchers beat a strategic retreat and burst through the passage upon Walt Tabor in the cell corridor. Dally moved to follow them, and halted.

THE two deputy sheriffs faced each other, tense and immobile, across the few feet of the passage. A bated silence fell on the jail, and even Leaning Joe waited without making a sound. But the lanky sheriff's gaze was shrewd and calculating at that moment, and it went from one to the other of his two deputies with interested study.

"I hears you're a deputy too," observed Walt, flat voiced.

"I am. And I just hears you are yourself," declared Dally, equally deadly.

"The point," suggested Walt, "the point is—who is first deputy?"

After a moment's consideration, Dally replied, "Yes. So it is. The answer is, I am."

"Your mistake, fellow. The first deputy is me."

"You're cockeyed."

"What?"

"Hey!" cried Leaning Joe. "Stop this arguing. How in time are these boys here going to have any resepect for the law if you two sets to fighting?"

"Law, hell!" bellowed the big Dally.

"Who says I'm cockeyed?" demanded Walt.

"Shut up!" yelled Leaning Joe. "By creation, here I got two depities given me to keep the peace, and they come right in my jail to stage a fight! I ain't going to stand for it. I got to pay for any damages done this here jail, and I ain't going to stand for it."

The two deputies stared through narrowed eyes at their roused superior. There was malignance in the stares. There was also a great deal of mental calculation going on behind those cold eyes. They looked at each other for a moment then, and as if by common impulse, staged an armistice.

"I'm going," said Dally. "But I'll be back." He turned and strode for the street door.

"So am I," said Walt. "And so will I be back." He followed a dozen paces behind his brother officer and the darkness outside received them both.

Leaning Joe addressed the three punchers. "Got any more money?" he asked hopefully. "Maybe we could have a little game in peace now."

"What I want to know," spoke up one, "what I want to know is am I a prisoner or not. I got to know."

"Me too," added a second. "One or the other."

Joe scratched his head. "Dang if I know!" he replied. "What was you arrested for to begin with?"

"We don't know that either. Dally Lowman starts shooting at us for nothing at all. We was just having a quiet drink over at Dirty Shirt Durkin's place and he busts in burning a keig of powder all at once."

Joe was in a quandry. He was worried, for the demands of legality on his conduct were very trying. "I dunno—" he began; and was interrupted.

"Tell you what," suggested the third cowboy. "You arrest us your own self and then they can't interrupt our game."

"That's the idea!" declared Joe. "What'll I arrest you for?"

"Well—" the cowboy considered. "Suppose we was to assault you? That's in the statutes, assaulting an officer."

"Yep, it is. All right, you assault me and I'll arrest you."

The cowboy walked up to Joe. They were both very serious. The cowboy estimated the tall officer, and hauled off and banged him soundly in the general vicinity of his left jaw.

Joe blinked once, staggered backward, and abruptly sat down on the floor. There he felt of the assaulted portion of his neck and face in a blank daze. His eyes cleared and he winced. After a moment he got to his feet slowly and eyed the cowboy.

"Did you mean that, fellow?" Joe inquired.

"Hell, no! I was assaulting you, all legal and according to statutes."

"Well, so long as you didn't mean it, it's all right." Joe felt tenderly of his face. "Only I couldn't help thinking for a minute you meant it, and if I thought you did—"

The three pushed into the cell they had lately vacated ahead of him, and Joe joined them about the packing box. The cards were dealt, and quickly Joe forgot his doubt of the other's intentions. The game proceeded in rapt silence.

Some time later Joe laid down his hand with a look of disgust and shouted to the outer office, "What you yelling for out there? Want me?"

Someone had been creating what is known as a furor all by himself in the office. He had called for Joe's immediate presence, but it was only natural that he should be unaware that Joe was at the moment in the act of attempting to fill a four straight flush. Once the futility of the attempt was demonstrated to Joe, at considerable expense, he was free to give the disturber some attention. He came to his feet, awkward in the cramped space, and with a promise to return he stamped outside.

In the center of the office, puffing with indignation, his suspicious eyes snapping angrily, Peaceful John Borden stood glaring at the sheriff. He came to the point without delay.

"What's this I hear about you making that foreman of Magpie's a deputy? You done that?"

"Sure I done it," said Joe in mild wonder. "Ain't nobody told you yet?"

"You bet they told me! But what in blazes did I tell you? Huh? What did I tell you?"

"Well, John, you see it was thisaway—" But Leaning Joe stopped in the middle of his explanation and stared at the street door. Peaceful John Borden, after a second, did likewise. Framed against the night, standing like a fighting bantam with ruffled feathers, was Henry Hanks.

"So? This gun toter is here giving you your orders, eh? I might have expected, after what I just heard."

Peaceful John thrust his big jaw a trifle more forward and arched his shoulders like a cat. He was extremely polite. "And what was it you just heard?"

Magpie's voice filled the little room. "That this dumb fool of a sheriff made your gunfighting foreman a deputy!"

Peaceful John filled out with wrath. "Well, it was me told him to!" he bellowed. "And what's your opinion of that? And furthermore, what's your idea in suborning law and order by making a deputy of your own foreman?"

"What?" demanded Magpie. He came into the room and faced the portly rancher. "You big crook!" he yelled. He shook his fist in his enemy's face. "For two cents I'd—"

Peaceful John went berserk. He forgot his gun; forgot the gun that Magpie carried; forgot the presence of Sheriff Leaning Joe. His heavy fist sailed through the air in Magpie's direction and a vast and inchoate roar issued from his throat.

Magpie, for all his anger, was alert, and he ducked. Recovering, he delivered a vicious poke at the nearest target Peaceful presented, his midriff. The big rancher's bellow stopped on the instant. Then they closed, and Peaceful John's big arms enfolded the little man.

LEANING JOE had observed all this with an interested but nonpartisan air. However, as the two men came together, a smile in which seemed to be considerable wisdom rose on Joe's long face. He drew his Colt from its holster, and raising the weapon, fired a shot at the ceiling. The explosion roared with deafening suddenness in the room.

The two ranchers disentangled immediately. In panic they whirled to face this sudden menace, hands going for their own guns. In that first split second neither knew whence had come the shot, but each suspected the other's followers of horning into the fracas. When they saw Leaning Joe standing before them, in his hand the .45 from which curled a gentle wisp of smoke, they froze. Astonishment seized them. They saw a different Joe Tolliver than they knew existed, and were a little appalled at the sight.

"That'll be enough of that," said Leaning Joe. He was smiling, but his eyes were wide awake and determined. "I been standing around letting you fellows run this here office, but now I'm through. You two elected me sheriff. I didn't ask for the dang job. But you gave it to me, I'm in it now, and I'm going to start working at it. Unbuckle those gun belts."

The muzzle of the Colt .45 waved in casual fashion in their direction and was a convincing argument. But even more convincing was that cold, determined smile on Joe's face. Peaceful John and Magpie unbuckled their belts and let them drop to the floor.

"Now head inside."

They headed inside, toward the jail. Joe followed, and ushered them into adjoining cells. He locked the doors. Then Magpie came to life.

"Hey, you, Leaning Joe; what's the idea?" Magpie's usual explosiveness was considerably missing from the demand.

"You'll find out soon," promised Joe.

"What do you mean, find out?" Peaceful John challenged.

"Wait and see. And meantime, you and Magpie talk it over. You two got considerable talking to do before I let you out."

The two ranchers stared at each other through the bars between their cells.

Joe walked to the other occupied cell, where the three Dixie punchers watched these proceedings in open mouthed curiosity. He jerked this door to, and the lock clicked.

"Joe!" exclaimed an incredulous puncher. "You ain't really locking us up, are you?"

"Yep. Don't worry. You'll have plenty company in a minute." And Leaning Joe, giving them no more satisfaction, departed.

THERE began a reign of something close to terror in the town of Rawhide. One by one men disappeared from all knowledge of their fellows. They were, oddly enough, all men of the Dixie or Hell on Wheels outfits, but no one noticed that at first. Nor did they connect the amiable visitations of Leaning Joe Tolliver with these mysterious disappearances.

A puncher drinking at a bar would suddenly become aware that his partner of years standing was no longer at his side. He would inquire of others about him, and find no knowledge of the partners' whereabouts. He would rove forth in search, peering into resorts and saloons, and uncover no trace of him. He would wander up dark alleys apprehensive of finding a lifeless body in the dusty path—and likely as not would meet a tall, lanky person who would shove a Colt .45 at his middle and order him to proceed by back ways to the jail. And there, it was also likely, he would find his bewildered partner in one of the cells, along with a mystified and bedeviled score or more of hands from the two outfits. They filled the jail. Leaning Joe brought prisoner after prisoner and forced them upon their fellows. The cells were crowded so that there was no room left to sit down. Beneath the cell cots reposed many who were unable for convivial reasons either to stand or sit.

Two cells, however, were left comparatively unoccupied. Neither Peaceful John nor Magpie had the ignominy of unwelcome company thrust upon them. They sat within their respective cubicles in mounting fury, watching their cohorts gathered in one by one, and whiled the time by glaring through the bars at each other and exchanging uncomplimentary remarks. When Joe Tolliver appeared they left off their private feud and poured venom upon him with equal heartiness. Gone was their first bewilderment, and a certitude of their sheriff's idiocy replaced it. More than ever were they convinced.

"Dang blast you, Joe Tolliver," roared Peaceful John, shaking the bars, "when I get out of here I'll skin you alive!"

Magpie Hanks included his present neighbor in his objurgations. "I might have known John Borden would be mixed up in this," he snarled. "I was a dumb fool ever to let you be sheriff."

Peaceful John turned to the little rancher. "You? You never had a word to say about it."

"I didn't, hey? I elected him."

"Like hell you did," returned Peaceful John. "I elected him."

"You big crook!" screeched Magpie. He came to the bars separating the cells and shook his fist at the big man. "You never did nothing around this country. You never—"

Peaceful John's big hands reached through the bars and grasped Magpie so firmly that the breath was choked in his throat. While Magpie danced helplessly in that grip the big man growled enraged and meaningless sounds.

Leaning Joe had watched with undisturbed interest and without reply. Now he walked through the corridor into the office and picked up the water pail that stood in a corner. He carried it back to the jail and standing before the two cells launched the contents upon both prisoners. They came apart, gasping and sputtering and very wet.

"Will you two stop that fool fighting?" Joe asked them.

"Gimme my gun and turn me loose!" demanded Magpie. "Gimme my gun."

"Never mind the gun," roared Peaceful John. "Just you turn me loose. Just you turn me loose, you hear."

Leaning Joe sighed, shrugged his shoulders in resignation and carried the pail back into the office. He shut the door after him and closed out the sounds that followed.

Sheriff Joe Tolliver seemed to know exactly what he was doing. He was still the amiable, tolerant Leaning Joe, but his tolerance held a great deal of assurance. He piled the captured weapons of his prisoners in a closet and closed and locked the door. From his desk he took a second cartridge belt and holster and strapped it about his waist. He put full loads in his two guns and thrust them in place. Then he stood in the open doorway looking out into the night. Practically all the hands of both ranches were locked in the jail behind him, and now he awaited the moment for his next move.

Soon Dally Lowman came along the street. He was making for the sheriff's office in a hurry. He addressed Joe immediately and with menace.

"What's happened?" he wanted to know. "Where's all my crowd. Where's all the Dixie gang?"

"Well, you been keeping cases on Borden's men, ain't you?" Joe returned. "You ought to know. You arrested half of them tonight."

The big, light haired deputy eyed his superior. There was suspicious irony in the glance. "Yes, I did. I notice they didn't stay arrested."

"Yep, they did. They're all inside, every last one of them."

"What?"

"I even got John Borden in a cell."

"Holy Moses! You did that?"

"I did. And what's more, I got all your gang, including Magpie himself locked up with them."

The big deputy said nothing, but he stared at the sheriff.

"Lissen here, fellow," went on Joe, "there's more happening tonight than you reckoned on. If I was you I'd be considerable worried. You seen Walt Tabor the last few minutes?"

"No," said Lowman.

"He's looking for you."

"Well?"

"Oh, don't think I'm trying to throw a scare into you," drawled Joe. "I know you and Walt ain't as bad enemies as you make out to be. I know a lot about the way you two worked this together. I heard plenty tonight."

"Keep it up, fellow," suggested Lowman between his teeth. "This is right interesting."

"It ought to be," allowed Joe. He leaned comfortably against the door jamb. "In a little while I'm going to turn this whole gang loose again. They're primed for murder. Especially your boss, Magpie. He begged me for the chance to shoot you personal and exclusive."

"What the hell you talking about?" demanded Dally Lowman. His right hand grasped his belt, not far from his gun, and his face was clouded with wrath and suspicion.

"Why, just that your game is up. Walt Tabor spilled the whole story. He told how you and him planned this trouble and went around misbranding calves and polluting water holes and killing stock and making big talk until you had your two outfits set to kill each other off. He told about you and him meeting in the hills and about the connections you was making with a gang up there to run off cows wholesale when the fighting started. Don't you think that sounds as if I learned everything?"

"It sounds as if you heard something," granted Lowman evenly. He eyed Joe with an oblique, gleaming stare; and suddenly moved, his right hand clutching at the gun on his belt. It was a murderous move.

"Better leave it right where it is," advised Joe. Lowman did, for the advice was backed up with Joe's .45, which was in the sheriff's hand and pointing directly at his deputy. "Now wait till I'm finished. Here's what happened. When I locked up Borden and Hanks together they got to talking. They're still talking in there. They found out they were mistaken in a lot of things. They found out the chief trouble between them came from you and Tabor. We all talked about it, and some of the other fellows had a few things to say too. Then Walt came in, same as you did, wondering what happened to everybody. I threw down on him, and when his boss accused him of doublecrossing him, he had to admit the truth. He says you was most responsible. Was you?"

"That's a damn lie! Walt Tabor is—"

"Well, we wont bother with the details, Dally," said Joe. "Here's the way it is. Walt promised to go and arrest you if we'd let him go free. He says he can prove you did most of the things that caused the trouble. Now lawing is a expensive waste of time. I let him go. He's probably looking for you right now."

"I'd like to have him find me," averred Dally Lowman. "I certainly would."

"Why?"

"Because he's a dang liar! He got me into this. He planned the whole thing, and he's just the skunk to doublecross me now."

"Well, can you prove anything on him?"

"You bet I can. Plenty."

"Suppose I was to let you go get him then. If he's the one that's in real bad he probably is on his way to saddle his horse and ride."

"If I meet him he won't be able to ride," promised Lowman. In his voice was the cold tone of a killer. "You let me go and I'll have him back here in ten minutes."

"You mean that?" Joe asked seriously.

Lowman simply gave Joe a fishy eyed stare.

"Well—" Joe's gun came down, and was replaced in the holster. "All right. Go ahead. But remember you better bring him in."

Dally turned and headed back the way he had come at a fast walk. There was grim determination in his gait.

AS SOON as Lowman was out of sight, Joe departed. He too went up town, but he went by back alleys and walked swiftly till he came to the rear of a certain saloon. He went in the dark back door and made his way to a private card room. There he found Walt Tabor engaged in a poker game. A nod of the head brought the deputy from the game and out to the rear door in the footsteps of his superior.

When they were alone on the back doorstep, Leaning Joe poked his gun in the dour Tabor's ribs and proceeded to talk. He wasted no time, and told a tale substantially the same as he had related to Dally Lowman. Tabor was a little more suspicious, a little more stubborn, but anger soon mounted in him also as the story of Lowman's perfidy came so convincingly from Joe's lips. He made one brief request.

"Give me the same chance you gave him," he asked grimly.

"Will you bring him in?" Joe inquired earnestly.

"Give me fifteen minutes and leave me my gun. That's all. I'll bring him in."

"All right," assented Joe. "I'll wait for you up at the jail." And he holstered the gun and departed forthwith.

Leaning Joe did not linger in his office. He entered the jail and unlocked the cells of Borden and Hanks. "Come on outside," he invited.

The pair were subdued and their wrath had cooled. Now they were sullen and uncomfortable in their damp garments. They sat down on chairs that Leaning Joe indicated and watched him as he procured a chew, got it working nicely, and spat into the sand box by his desk.

"All this fighting is over," Joe announced.

"Huh!" grunted Peaceful John.

"I'm sheriff of this here county, and I'm telling you. Fighting is again' the law, besides disturbing business and upsetting everybody, including the sheriff."

"Huh!" said Magpie in turn.

"The reason there ain't going to be any more fighting is because the fightingest hombres ever was around this country is gone. Your foremen, Dally Lowman and Walt Tabor, is pounding the roads at this minute for parts unknown and unfrequented."

"What?" exclaimed the two.

"Yep. My deputies has deserted me."

"How come?" demanded Magpie.

Sheriff Leaning Joe proceeded to relate the events of the past half hour. Both Hanks and Borden were dumbfounded as they listened to the story. Leaning Joe had launched a gigantic bluff, and it had worked. He told the ranchers that his charge of conspiracy against the two men was founded on little more than a suspicion. Up at his shack in the hills he had extended a rough hospitality to the infrequent riders who passed his way, and it was in that manner that he had made the acquaintance of Tabor and Lowman. He had seen them together there, and he had seen them with other men—men who were not riders for either outfit, cold eyed, thin mouthed men who rode down out of the high country on mysterious errands. It was none of his business to wonder what brought them together. Not, that is, until he was made sheriff, and then it became vitally his business. He knew the pair had been secretly on good terms at a time when their violent enmity was the talk of the country. From a suspicion of that strange circumstance it had been a short step to further conjecture regarding the Dixie and Hell on Wheels feud. A hint here, a word there—and Leaning Joe had played his bluff for all it was worth when the proper moment came.

"Why in hell didn't you tell us?" wailed Magpie. "What in time made you lock us up and let them get away?"

"What good would it do to arrest them?" Joe asked. "I couldn't prove anything."

"We could have lynched them," roared Peaceful John, suddenly come to life. "By gosh, we could have strung them to a tree."

Leaning Joe eyed the big rancher. "You listen here, John Borden. There ain't going to be no more fighting, lynching or any kind of promiscuous killing in this country. I'm sheriff, and I'm telling you plain. Them two fellows is gone, and we'll never see them again. I locked you all up so they could go, and go in a hurry. I saved the county all kinds of money. I saved—"

THE door burst open and Joe came to a halt. Standing in the entrance a wild eyed figure blinked and surveyed the three. "My gosh!" said the newcomer, in solemn awe. "My gosh!"

"The Dude!" said Magpie. "Where you been all evening?"

"They're both killed," said the Dude. "Both of them."

"Who?" cried Peaceful John.

"My gosh, what a gunfighting pair! *Bang, bang, bang*—and they were both dead. Both of them."

"Fellow, will you tell us who's dead!" barked John Borden.

"Walt Tabor and Dally Lowman."

And in truth they were, as the Dude's story made clear. The Dude, asleep in the hay loft, had been awakened by sounds of tense altercation in the stable below him. He looked down to see what was going on and saw the two foremen facing each other. Apparently they had encountered while they both were coming to saddle their horses and ride. After the first surprise, wrath had swept over them, and they had drawn their guns. The result was as the Dude had described it.

"Well," said Leaning Joe resignedly, "they was looking for it. I gave them a chance."

"Son of a gun!" exclaimed Borden in wonder. "To think I trusted him like I did. By gosh, though, I used to think there was something funny about that fellow. I bet if you look him up he's wanted for murder somewheres."

"I'll bet he is," agreed Magpie. "I always said so."

"Said what?" inquired Peaceful John, his brow clouding.

"That you hired gunfighters and killers, that's what I said."

"You soured, shriveled up nubbing of uselessness!" roared Peaceful John. "Your own crew of rustlers and hay wire—"

"Shut up!" yelled Leaning Joe. "By gosh, I told you there ain't going to be no more fighting, didn't I? You two say another word and I'll put you back in the lock-up."

The two ranchers stared up at the sheriff who reared above them. Then they stared at each other. Magpie scratched his head. "I dunno," he said. "You're right. This here fighting ought to be done with."

Peaceful John cleared his throat ponderously and with a trace of embarrassment. "Well, I think Joe's right too. Of course, when anybody starts making reflections again' my outfit—well—"

"I wasn't making any reflections again' your outfit," snapped Magpie.

Peaceful John stared at the little man, suspicious of his tone and uncertain of his words. "Well," he said, "if that's the case, I ain't got any special grudge."

"Neither have I," asserted Magpie. "I never started this anyway."

"Well, I'd like to know—" began Borden. But a warning glance from Leaning Joe silenced him. "Oh hell, I don't care who started it. Listen here, Magpie. About that north range waterhole. I been wanting to tell you I got no objections to sharing it with you. My cows can't drink it all."

"Sure," said Magpie, smiling all at once. "I need that water bad. And you know that section of fence on the east line? I been aiming to have that fixed for the past three months, only this here trouble prevented me."

"And that hay you got burned on you," went on Borden. "I got a plenty of alfalfa stacked away and you can have some right on the range real cheap."

"That there bunch of mavericks, too—" began Magpie. But Leaning Joe interrupted.

"You fellows wait till you get alone," he protested. "I told you that you had a lot of talking to do. Wait till I let these fellows out of the cells back here, and we'll all go and have a drink."

"Behold," said the Dude, striking a slightly pie-eyed attitude in the doorway, "behold a man! He speaketh words of infinite wisdom. Less have two drinks."

And so they did. And that night the town of Rawhide, reverting to its own boisterous good nature with a shout of relief at the end of the Dixie and Hell on Wheels feud, staged an inaugural celebration for its brand new sheriff that made history.

The First of a Series of Stories About an American Sergeant Who Became a Chinese General

The Capture of Ping-chow

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

BRIGADIER-GENERAL THOMPSON stood on the level roof of the low, white-washed railway station, watching some of the most modern field artillery in China being loaded on flat cars. Pulling one hand from the pocket of his padded gray overcoat, he doffed his kepi, heavy with gold braid, and fished therefrom a sack of tobacco—"the makings" always leave such a mess in a fellow's pocket. The action was like the unmasking of a dark lantern. A little group of coolies which had gathered below to watch the eccentric actions of the foreign-devil on the roof expressed sing-song astonishment as the general's bristling head of red hair flashed above the bulky form of Henry Pu Ting. Henry, aide and interpreter to the general, with his generous contours resembling the God of Prosperous Crops dressed in a quilted black silk coat cut on the lines of a wheat sack, watched in admiration as his superior rolled a cigarette with one hand.

"Will you look at them tramps," said Brigadier-General Thompson, feeling in his pockets for a match. He frowned as he watched a four-inch gun slowly leave the ground, while a score of gray clad Chinese soldiers heaved and tugged. It rose breech first in cadence with the chant of the soldiers—a long drawn-out "Hoo-o-o," answered by a staccato "Ho-ho," half a tone lower, repeated with each rhythmical heave.

"Henry!"

The A. D. C. saluted with a fat hand.

"Will you yell at those birds to grab the muzzle of that gun outa the dirt. We ain't taking these toys clear to the Yangtse to set up as ornaments in front of the county court house. And when you're through yelling, will you find the Slovak commander of that battery and send him to me to tell why there ain't a cork in Molly's mouth. I'm not taking any boy scout outfit on an over-night hike. We're going south to fight."

Henry Pu Ting understood, yelled for two minutes, and then went gingerly down a bamboo ladder. He understood because he had been comprador for a Tientsin tobacco house almost ever since American troops had been stationed in China, and his many dealings with many infantry canteens had taught him something of the American language. Then he knew General Thompson when he was plain Sergeant Joe Thompson of the 15th U. S. Infantry at Tientsin. In fact, it was Henry who put Thompson in touch with Liao after his discharge.

Liao, a wily Mongolian border Tuchun, had made a proposition, and Thompson, a fighter for years without a fight, had accepted. Buried in the Philippines for part of the World War and drilling recruits in home camps for the rest, the fire that smouldered behind his quiet blue eyes blazed up at the chance for adventure. Action, instead of the monotony of morning reports and the school of the platoon! And Liao was so pleased with his soldierly talents that he made him a brigadier-general and handed him the army to drill.

AFTER six months of sporadic skirmishes in the hills about Nankow Pass, Liao had sold the services of General Thompson and some four thousand men to One-armed Hwang, a prosperous little Tuchun of the Yangtse Valley. Hwang was shut up in his capital city of Ping-chow by a jealous neighbor, and was in sore need of reinforcements. He could afford to buy well-trained troops, for Ping-chow was a paying concern. Hwang collected a handsome revenue from the Salt Gabelle here—just let Peking get it away from him!—and levied a toll on passing junks. It was even whispered that Ping-chow was no mean market for the product of the illicit poppy fields of Hupeh Province. To rescue all this revenue, Thompson was hurrying south to drive off the besiegers.

The commercial character of military operations in China did not bother Thompson greatly. Better generals than he had had their armies bought out from under them on the eve of battle. As long as he was furnished a good scrap, he did not look too closely at who paid the sniper. Ideals were all right for generals who had plenty of money and political backing. But Thompson's chief, Liao, was only vaguely nationalistic—probably he received none of the subsidies which the Japanese hand out in north China—and he was not yet important enough to interest the Soviet Russian agitators. He was therefore merely a small magnate in China's large and growing industry, civil war. And Thompson was his technical adviser and executive secretary. He carried his professional knowledge into the martial industry with the same gusto and taste for conflict that Walker displayed in Nicaragua and Frederic Ward showed before Shanghai.

The former sergeant thrilled to his expeditionary preparation. The fifteen thousand Mexican dollars he had received as his share of the Liao-Hwang deal could not alone account for that buoyancy of spirit as he stood on the roof of a provincial Chinese railway station some thirty miles south of Peking, pacing back and forth to have an eye on the entrainment all along the siding. He experienced that same feeling of mastery as when he was given his first platoon to drill. He cupped his hands, shouted orders, encouraged, reprimanded. He was still a sergeant at heart. It made no difference to him that his picturesque exaggerations were not understood. Henry would make the meaning clear, and the commands were always executed.

"Colonel Zatkoff below, sir."

The oval Manchu face of Henry Pu Ting appeared over the edge of the roof.

"Send him up."

Zatkoff was chief of a battalion of White Russian mercenaries which Thompson had picked up to man his artillery. The ex-sergeant sometimes felt slightly uneasy in the presence of his only white troops. It was a strange feeling, which Thompson had never actually admitted. There was no question of inferiority complex, for the ex-sergeant was securely confident behind the gold-braid of his rank. Yet the very fact that the Russians were refugees from the Bolshevist revolution indicated that they were aristocrats in some measure. Many of them were ex-Tsarist officers who had fled across Siberia and drifted into northern China through Harbin.

The bony form of the bearded Zatkoff, in khaki uniform topped with a black Astrakhan cap, mounted the bamboo ladder. He glared at Thompson, and Thompson stared back.

"Say, Zatkoff."

"Colonel Zatkoff."

"If you're a colonel, it must be in the Moscow high school cadets, judging from the way them field pieces have been put aboard to-day. The Chinks have been rubbing their noses in the dirt, and nothing in there to stop it. I might just as well have a Chinese artillery officer."

Zatkoff passed his hand over his rough-hewn features and yawned.

"Chinese can teach what to graduate of St. Petersburg Military Academy?" he inquired. Like most Russians, Zatkoff spoke English, of a sort.

"He can teach you that a four-inch gun shoots a damn sight better when the rifling isn't full of gravel, for one thing."

"For Chinese doings I cannot myself responsible," said the Russian.

"All right, Peter the Great, from now on your outfit will do its own dirty work under your personal direction, if you say you won't take the responsibility for the Chink coolie operations." Thompson glanced at a quintet of locomotives puffing out clouds of smoke on a spur track. "The third section is ready. You can entrain your men now, and you will yourself take charge of unloading the artillery at Hankow."

The Russian silently turned to go.

"And Zatkoff—."

Zatkoff paused on the ladder.

"Smile," Thompson called after him.

Zatkoff smiled. But his full, irregularly-moulded lips expressed no amusement. The smile was one of condescension and superiority.

AT INTERVALS of an hour other sections of the brown, shabby-looking wooden cars which made up Thompson's troop train started south. As the last section was shunted on to the main line, its cars packed so full of almond-eyed soldiers in full equipment that the familiar 40-and-8 voitures of France would have looked like parlor cars in comparison, Henry Pu Ting made his thirty-sixth trip up the ladder. The station roof was strewn with the butts of hand-made cigarettes, the rolling of each of which sent the general's kepi a little further over his le ear.

"Headquarters car ready, sir," said the interpreter-aide, "and gentleman has arrived inside."

"What gentleman?"

"Why, long narrow European gentlema with many pieces baggage."

Thompson partly closed one eye an sucked in the left corner of his mouth. He was expecting no one. Perhaps thi was a railway official with last-minute obstacles, seeking extra fees. Thompson wa not paying any more squeeze if he coul help it.

"Go back and tell whoever it is," h said, "that this ain't a passenger train, an that he'd better clear out before I arriv Tell him I've got a bad temper but a goo trigger finger."

"Yes sir, I already tell him. He sa 'That's old kay, I wait.' So he wait."

General Thompson was not a parti ularly big man, but he took particular big strides once he was off the roof an headed for the railway director's car tha had been rigged up for his personal u

"See that we pull outa here in exact five minutes," he said to Henry Pu Ti who panted at his heels. "All visito will have been put ashore four minut previous."

The first thing Thompson saw as entered the car was a pile of varnish wooden cases, with a heavy wooden fol ing tripod strapped to one of them. Th he noticed two incredibly long legs stretc ing half-way across the car from a fad green-plush armchair. The legs were e cased in leather puttees about the size a shape of short sections of six-inch pi The portion of the owner of the legs se above the back of the chair indicated th he was built to scale. Clouds of fragra smoke were issuing from under a tilte back hat of tobacco-colored felt.

"I guess you've made a mistake, miste said the red-headed soldier. "This is private train."

"I know it is, General," replied t owner of the legs, with a voice which a peared to start as far down as the leath puttees, "but I haven't made a mista Have a cigar."

The stranger rose, showing himself head taller than the soldier. Thomps eyed the proffered gift suspiciously. Then he said coldly:

"This train is starting in about three minutes. Those boxes of yours look as though it might hurt 'em to get thrown off a train while in motion."

The tall man replaced the cigar in his breast pocket and drew out a wallet.

"Here's who I am," he said, handing Thompson a card, as big as a diploma, proclaiming: GLENN KIFER, Cinematographer.

"This ain't a dress parade, Mr. Kifer," said Thompson. "It looks like we were going to have a war. You might get hurt. I'll have a man help you off with your traps, there."

"Listen, General," said the cinematographer. "I'm not looking for a picnic. I won't get in your way. I'm doing a series of personality films, about people all over the world who do unusual things. I made a picture of the barefooted banana picker who got to be president of What-d'ye-call-it down in Central America. I did a high-society film of Hoozispopolous, the guy that breaks the bank at Deauville every summer and Cannes every winter. Now I want to get a record of your campaign and a lot of personality stuff about you."

Thompson said nothing, and Kifer, who was a diplomat as well as a camera man, went on:

"It'll be a great thing for you to get known to thousands of people like this. You can get any kind of job you want back home after the film is released."

The blue-trimmed cap of Henry Pu Ting appeared around the door frame.

"Starting, sir," said Henry.

Thompson appeared not to hear. He sat down opposite the elongated Kifer and took off his kepi.

"Will they be showing this film in Saint Louis?" he asked. "My folks live out there."

There was a jar, a groan, and a jerky creaking as the last contingent of the Ping-chow relief force started rolling toward the Yangtse.

"Sure they'll show it in Saint Louis," said Kifer. "All our two-reeler personality films have been big hits out there."

Brigadier-General Thompson stood up suddenly and snapped on his cap.

"All right," he said in a loud, authoritative voice. "All right. You can stick if you want to. But remember that I'm running the show."

It was a two-day run to the Yangtse, two days crossing monotonous brown plains over which the winter wind swept unchecked by the occasional walled village of mud houses, or the rare leafless trees.

Thompson was not quite satisfied with having yielded so readily to Kifer. Suppose he was on some underhanded mission for a rival Tuchun, carrying his camera as a blind? He would bear watching. But Kifer's friendliness and flattery disarmed Thompson's suspicions before the frozen stretch of the Yellow River was reached.

"Of course, General," Kifer would say, "we can make a lot better battles right in Hollywood than was ever fought in any of these here chop-suey wars. But it's your confounded guts and gumption, running an army without even speaking the language, that's making my company spend a lotta money to have me follow you around. They're ready to spend money, too."

"I'll give you a lens-full for the folks back home," Thompson would reply. After all, Kifer was a compatriot. Why be suspicious like this. "I'm all cramped up after a winter in the north. Too cold to get an enemy to fight with. The Peking regulars were all rigged out in comfortable barracks, and we couldn't coax a skirmish out of 'em for anything. But wait till we get to Ping-chow. Some little Napoleon down the river is pop-eyed with envy at all the money One-armed Hwang squeezes out of Ping-chow, so he's trying to squeeze Hwang. Hwang must have mortgaged his city to buy this army, but it'll be worth it. Boy, we'll pry off that siege so fast you'll have to turn your crank double time to get us all in."

THOMPSON arrived in Hankow to find thirty-three of his men hospitalized: Twenty-nine Chinese and four Russians. The fight had started at the station, during the unloading of the artillery. Nobody seemed to know exactly how it started.

The Chinese version, naturally, put the blame on the Russians and their natural brutality. Zatkoff, who was located in a bar in the old Russian Concession, told a story of an ambush and oriental trickery. He even intimated that he thought Thompson was inciting the Chinese troops to hate the white artillerymen.

There was no doubt about there being bad blood between the white and the yellow troops. The natural arrogance of the Russian mercenaries was probably responsible for most of it. But Thompson saw that this very arrogance brought a certain respect, bred of fear, which might be useful in battle discipline. He decided to husband the prestige of the white battalion for possible future use.

"Never mind doing the stevedoring on the guns," he told Zatkoff. "I've decided to let the Chinks pack 'em aboard. Just be on hand to see they don't drop 'em in the river."

Zatkoff received this relief from fatigue duty which he had brought on himself, as a matter of course. In his indifference there may have even been a feeling that Thompson had given way before him, that blood, when it was blue enough, would always tell in the end. The actual transshipment to river steamers was a humdrum matter.

It was nearly midnight when the little fleet started down stream. A damp penetrating cold hovered over the Yangtse, freezing the spray on the bows. A light snow which had fallen early in the evening had melted and frozen again, covering decks and davits with a thin shell of ice. All night long came the chanting cry of the quartermaster in the chains. Navigation was dangerous in the Yangtse at this time of year, and constant soundings were necessary to keep in the shifting channel. But the Chinese quartermaster was somewhat of a dignitary, and did not handle the chilling hand lead himself. His personal "boy" hauled out the line, coiled it, and set it swinging again for his superior. The quartermaster merely read the markings by the yellow light of an oiled-paper lantern, and cried them in mournful song to the bridge.

The coming of gray, monotonous day found five drab steamers moving along in file over the drab surface of the river, between banks sometimes out of sight, sometimes flanked by the ghosts of hills shivering in their ragged mantles of snow behind shifting veils of cold mist. Sometimes spirit junks materialized for a moment in all the barbaric strangeness of their polygonal, heavy-ribbed sepia sails, only to slip again into the ephemeral realm of the river brume.

At nightfall the ships were warping alongside the docks of the last friendly port above Ping-chow. Not wishing to risk a disastrous approach by water to a port perhaps in the hands of the Ping-chow besiegers, Thompson had decided to make the last stage of his expedition overland—a hard, disagreeable stage, but to him the deadliest method of striking.

BY MIDNIGHT the searchlights of reconnoitering motorcyclists were streaking the darkness along the river and on the flank of the advance party, made up of husky Manchus, all veterans of at least five civil wars. Ex-ricksha pullers made inexhaustible connecting files with the rest of the advance guard, and the silent, half-frozen main column which slowly began crawling toward Ping-chow.

Thompson himself headed the main column in a ubiquitous flivver, armed with a machine gun. His pace was that of the infantry, for the countryside was apparently virgin to motor traffic. There was no road. The only thoroughfare leading to Ping-chow had been rendered useless to four-wheeled traffic of any kind by thousands of heavily laden wheelbarrows which had creaked over it, cutting it to dust which the wind blew away. In some places this narrow rut was three and four feet deep. The wheeled elements of Thompson's column took to the fields, where they were forced to thread their way through centuries of China's past. All China is a vast graveyard, and Thompson's auto was constantly zigzagging among the grave mounds which pimpled the country, as big as packing cases or houses, according to the importance of the corpse.

Suddenly Thompson shook the snoring Kifer who slept through the roughest bumps. A crackling seemed to come from somewhere ahead. Thompson held up his hand.

"Halt!" he shouted.

The command ran back through the column.

"Stop the engine."

There was a protest from the chauffeur.

"He say cannot get it started after on

account cold," interpreted Henry Pu Ting from the front seat.

"Then he can push," snapped Thompson. "Shut it off."

Silence. Then the sound of a shot. Three shots. Then a running fire.

Thompson was immediately all soldier. He leapt to his feet on the rear seat, shouting orders which were to bring up the first battalion in extended order. There was the trampling and shuffling of hundreds of hurried feet, an undercurrent of murmurs and quick breaths, the tenor punctuation of commands, and an occasional metallic clinking. Then a messenger came panting out of the night.

"All finish," interpreted Henry Pu Ting. "Enemy all ready to run away."

"There may be more behind," said Thompson. "Crank her up and we'll go see what's happening."

The enemy did not seem over-anxious to fight. When the headlights of General Thompson's auto illuminated the scene of the skirmish, firing had ceased. A few furtive figures, in apparent distress and great haste, were dodging from one grave mound to another, yelling at their pursuers who were yelling back.

A score of captives were finally herded into the glare of the headlights like scared jack-rabbits.

"All this fuss for a measly dozen sprinters," said Thompson, looking over the blinking group. "We ought to shoot 'em for making us so much trouble."

Then he noticed a portly captive in the front ranks, trying to make out faces behind the dazzling lights. The man was not in uniform. His long coat of black silk, the mark of prosperity or official position, was half torn away. The turned-up collar was fur-lined, and the little mandarin cap on his shaven head was topped with a bright red button. Two narrow eyes nearly disappeared in a fat, round, pock-marked face. His thick lips were liver colored.

Thompson sucked in one corner of his mouth as he noticed the prisoner's left sleeve was empty.

"Ask this bird who he is," the general directed his interpreter.

"He say he name Hwang, Tuchun of Ping-chow," was the reply through Henry. "And he say that if you are general he buy from Liao, he think he pay plenty money for not be thusly assassinated."

"Well, what the hell is he doing running around out here at four o'clock in the morning? Don't his troops still hold Ping-chow?"

An exchange of mandarin.

"Yes, still hold Ping-chow. But no longer *his* troops. Now belong enemy-side. Enemy plenty rich, plenty rich; can buy plenty army."

"So he is sneaking away like a licked purp?"

"No, sir. He say he is going to Hankow, where he has friend, very rich banker, who—"

"Say is this a war or a bargain sale?" inquired General Thompson testily. "You tell Mr. Hwang that he's already spent too much money on his town. Tell him he'd better come along to help me out on the geography of his election district, because I'm going to take back Ping-chow without the loss of a single dollar."

"How can you do it?" inquired Kifer, as the column got under way again, with Hwang squeezed into Thompson's car.

AFTER a moment of rage at not being able to photograph the encounter in the dark, the camera man seemed greatly amused over the plight of One-armed Hwang and his quest of financial reinforcements.

"How can you do it? All the Chinese gods are on the side of the fattest bank roll. Suppose some Chink with his winter togs padded with ten-dollar bills comes sneaking into camp and purchases a second-hand regiment some day while you're out reconnoitering?"

"Are you a buyer?" asked Thompson suspiciously.

"No, but you told me yourself the whole outfit had just been bought from Liao. Why shouldn't it change hands again?"

"That's one of the gambles of war in this man's country," Thompson replied. "I hold some pretty good cards against it: My discipline ain't bad, my food is fairly plentiful, and my pay is pretty regular."

"But the Chinaman is a philosopher. He likes to fight as long as there is no risk of getting shot. Some of you western barbarians have spoiled the whole game by bringing in machine guns and cannons. Any Chink would rather have his jeans full of copper than his back full of lead."

"It depends on who's running 'em," said Thompson. "If a Chinese gang lets an idea get a-hold of 'em, they'll follow it right through. Just keep the ideas headed in the right direction, and you get a fightin' army."

"I hope so," said Kifer. "I've got a lot of blank film I'm saving for the capture of Ping-chow."

The moon-faced Hwang, who had remained sullenly silent all night, sighed and croaked pessimistically as a mournful dawn revealed territory that had once been his: Little walled villages of a dozen houses; rolling fields, bare and frosty, studded with graves and tile-capped tombs of masonry; mud farm-houses, each with its own wall for individual security against bandits and pillaging soldiers. Hwang took a slow, panoramic look about him, closed his eyes as though the scene were painful, and made a vague gesture which apparently meant that Ping-chow was ahead just out of sight, and would probably always remain out of sight for all the confidence he had in wars without money.

The relief force halted in a little hollow which was surrounded on three sides by hills and on the fourth by the river. The red-headed general and the one-armed Tuchun climbed the ridge ahead. Two miles beyond lay Ping-chow, a jumble of gray-tile roofs, girt by a massive wall of which the varied shades of weathered gray indicated the progressive editions and repairs since it was first built by the Ming Emperors. The roofs seemed to flow down a gentle slope toward the river, from the summit of a hill which arose within the walls and which lifted the long back span of fortifications into a camel's-back arch. Old and new China were united on this hill. On the river side of the summit was the truncated pyramid of a stocky pink tower, capped with an upturned roof of crimson tile—the tower where alarm gongs were beaten when Ping-chow was attacked centuries ago. On the back slope stood the white cylinders of a dozen oil tanks.

"Pu caw-ee!" grunted One-armed Hwang, as Thompson squatted down out of the skyline and contemplated the three gates which pierced the wall on the side from which the attack would logically come.

"No can do," translated Henry Pu Ting. "He say have look-see at red tower with telescope glass. Full of artilleries he say. Bad."

Thompson raised his binoculars. There were indeed cannon planted on the hilltop, about the base of the tower and on the platform where the gongs were once sounded. The guns commanded the gates to the city, and could play havoc with any infantry trying to force its way through the walls.

The general put up his glasses and rolled a cigarette, which he let hang from his lips, unlighted. He looked again through his binoculars, and for a moment studied the extra-mural portion of Ping-chow, a settlement between the walls and the river, which the presence of numerous tall chimneys indicated was occupied by foreign industry—indifferent to the petty wars of jealous Tuchuns, to judge from the black clouds rolling from the factory chimneys. Thompson rose and crossed the crest again. Before him the valley swarmed with gray uniforms, animated by a vague, slow movement in which there was the occasional glint of steel. A hundred columns of diaphanous smoke hesitated in the air; the army was about to have its *chi-fan*. Beyond were the artillery parks and the supply train in perfect order. At the sight of this apparent discipline Thompson lighted his cigarette and turned confidently to Hwang.

"Sure, it can be done," he said. "It'll take a little doing, but once we dry-clean that hill over there, the trick'll be simpler."

Two hours later artillery positions were being prepared just back of the crest of the hill.

Thompson, too long a sergeant to be a theorist, had to touch the things of battle. He moved from gun to gun, criticising detail, using glowing words to convey his commands to the Russian artillerymen, pushing Kifer out of the way whenever the cinematographer thought he had found a spot to plant his camera. The sound of a siren caused the general to turn.

A BRIGHT red runabout was coming into the vale on the river side, its warning horn going full blast. At the rear of the car a large Union Jack was flying, as protection against stray bullets. The red auto bumped along half-way up the rough hillside, then stopped. Two men got out and came toward the crest, accompanied by a sentry with fixed bayonet, who had jumped on the running board as the car came into the lines. A plump, florid European gentleman in a light tan overcoat and bowler hat led the way at a very excited pace. At his heels was a tall Chinese in a long pale-blue gown and black satin jacket—evidently an interpreter, for the red-faced European said to him in English: "Tell them I want to see their No. 1 man."

Taken to the spot where Thompson was looking for more fault to find with the battery placements, the stranger turned to his interpreter and said: "Ask him what he intends to do with all these cannon?"

"Ask him yourself," interrupted Thompson with a voice not yet decided whether to become annoyed or amused. "He can understand you even if you have got a limey accent a foot thick."

"I beg your pardon," said the surprised stranger. "I didn't know. You're an American, aren't you?"

"Did you ever see a red-headed Chinaman?" countered the general. "If you did, you probably didn't see him prying into other people's business like some red-faced Englishmen I've seen."

"I beg your pardon," repeated the European. "Perhaps I should have introduced myself first. I'm Harold Helvington, Ping-chow agent for the Lion Petroleum Company, Limited. May I ask why all this preparation?"

"Sure, you may ask. And you can report to your board of directors that all this preparation is to blow them pop-guns off the hill over yonder."

"But you really can't do that, you know," said Helvington nervously, glancing at the field pieces.

"Just stick around and see," replied Thompson proudly. "This ain't one of them joke Chinese armies that puts signs on its backs to insult the enemy while it's running away. My artillery officers can figure a trajectory, and my gunners can shoot pretty straight."

"No reflection on your military ability, my dear General." The Lion Petroleum agent was perspiring in spite of the cold. "What I mean to say is that you really can't be thinking of bombarding the city."

Thompson laughed.

"Don't worry, Mr. Helvington. According to my maps, the foreign settlement is outside the walls, and won't get hurt at all."

"But you don't understand. Those oil tanks on the hill you say you intend firing on—they belong to my company."

"That's your company's hard luck," replied Thompson. "Because I ain't organizing no massacre by trying to push my infantry through the walls with a bunch of iron dogs barking at 'em."

Helvington suddenly regained his composure. He fastened the top button of his overcoat, which had come undone in his walk up the hill, put his mittened hands in his overcoat pockets, spread his feet a trifle, and cocked his head a little to one side.

"I must remind you, General," he said gravely, "that foreign interests in China are sacred. You may trifle with minor oriental militarists if you like, but if you fire on those reservoirs, you will have to answer to the Powers. The H. M. S. Iron Sparrow, not to mention the somewhat antiquated American gunboat Volcano, are just down the river. They are only too anxious to protect foreign lives and property, as they've had nothing much to protect recently."

Thompson was not at all awed by the Britisher's posture, but he needed no reflection to know that it was useless to think of drawing foreign gunboats into his little war. Familiarly he took the arm of Helvington, surprised out of his haughtiness, and walked him toward the crest until Ping-chow came into view.

"Listen, Mr. Helvington," he said, pointing to the white cylinders on the slope of the distant hill. "How much oil have you got stored in yonder tanks?"

"How much—in gallons?"

"In Mexican dollars."

"I couldn't say offhand, exactly. At least $75,000 worth."

"Will you wait here just a second? I may buy it from you. There is a little business matter."

Thompson walked briskly toward a six-pounder, on which Glenn Kifer was posing a Russian gun crew, with a few Chinese shell carriers in the background for color.

"Hello, General," he said jovially as Thompson approached. "When does the war start?"

"Say, Kifer." The general was serious. "It would be rotten luck for you if this here battle had to be fought at night, and you couldn't photograph a thing except the flash of the guns—like last night?"

"It would, you know it," said Kifer, his smile fading. "Are you counting on doing this business in the dark?"

"Why, I don't know exactly. I was just saying it *might* come off at night. How many Mexican dollars would it be worth to your company to have the battle fought by daylight? I can promise you lots of action and the fine spectacle of a lot of expensive oil tanks being blown up by shell fire . . ."

Kifer's grin returned, wider than ever.

"So you've finally come to it, have you?" he chuckled.

"Come to what?"

"Chinese strategy. Aren't you looking for capital to buy out the enemy?"

"I am not. I promise you a regular scrap. But I'll have some reparations to pay. How much of a Dawes Plan can your expense account stand?"

Kifer pondered a moment.

"I might slip over $50,000 Mex., top figure, if you need that much."

"I do, and more."

"That's all I can possibly do."

"It's to square up the oil cans I may have to blow to pieces. I'll put in the fifteen thou' I get out of the Hwang-Liao deal—a snappy battle is worth that much any time—and I'll see if I can talk the lime-juicer outa the rest."

"You can count on me for my share," said Kifer thoughtfully, "on one condition: Don't start anything before eight in the morning. The . . . ah . . . the light's bum before then."

Thompson returned to Helvington, who was walking about impatiently.

"Can you move about $10,000 worth of axle grease and candles off that hill by tomorrow morning?" asked Thompson.

"Are you buying that much?"

"I want an option on $65,000 worth," said Thompson, rolling a cigarette. "Then if it gets spoiled accidentally tomorrow, why then I'll pay for it."

Helvington's eyebrows changed altitude by half an inch. He cleared his throat for a moment. Then he said:

"And this . . . this option. I'm to grant that merely on your word?"

Thompson unbuttoned his padded gray blouse and fished inside for a checkbook. "My word's good," he said, writing as he spoke, "but to convince you, I'll give you my check on the Asiatic Bank of Tientsin as guarantee. It's for $15,000. For the rest, you can have the papers ready for me tomorrow, and I'll sign 'em as I enter your city with my army just before noon. But take my advice and don't loiter around them oil tanks of yours after sun-up."

THE sun was setting beyond the Yangtse, with a burst of crimson through a ragged rift in the wintry cloud dome. The ruddy sunset glow threw into unnatural relief the evening bustle of the camp, unconsciously uneasy over the approaching battle. A chill wind from the river blew a few flakes of soft, damp snow against the cheek of General Joe Thompson as he stood talking to the rotund and mournful One-armed Hwang. Hwang advocated immediate attack; enemy reinforcements would be arriving soon.

"Tell him, Henry," said Thompson to his aide, "that the noise will begin at breakfast time tomorrow. I can't start the show tonight because I got an arrangement with the Reparations Commission. Say, where is Kifer, anyhow?"

"Long narrow gentleman? He leave this place plenty time ago. He take boxes go Ping-chow side."

Thompson looked as though he did not understand.

"You sure he went to Ping-chow?"

"Yes, sir; about two o'clock with fat foreign gentleman."

What was Kifer doing in Ping-chow? Making pictures? Picking the angle for his battle shots tomorrow? Maybe—and maybe not. "What a simple soul you are," Thompson was muttering to himself, "to believe everything that guy told you. Movie operator! Spy, more likely, and a clever one. Why didn't you throw him off the train like you first started to? Then he wouldn't be over there now, showing 'em pictures of our positions, so we get the spots knocked off our fancy artillery tonight."

The sunset was now a luminous thread of scarlet, lying crumpled along the horizon. Darkness had almost obliterated the patterns of thousands of shelter tents overlaid on the floor of the vale. Hundreds of fires, trailing off to mere points of light, made the only spots of warmth in the perspective. Thompson thoughtfully regarded the nearest fires, around which squatted groups of oriental soldiers, scooping in their evening rice from bowls held close to their faces. The wind-driven snow-flakes now began to sting.

"Henry," said Thompson to his interpreter, "it looks like a warm night. Tell the second machine gun company to move beyond the ridge, where I showed the captain this afternoon. And tell the commander of the second Shansi infantry battalion to take up a position behind the ridge half a mile to the south to protect our flank if anything starts ahead of schedule."

He watched his aide disappear in the dark. After a moment he thought he heard the explosive accents of wrangling voices. The glowing orange spots of a dozen fires flickered, went out, and reappeared again as moving figures passed and repassed. The even murmur of the camp swelled into a subdued roar, punctuated by guttural shouts in a northern dialect.

Henry Pu Ting returned, out of breath, a firmament of half-melted snow-flakes glistening on his black coat.

"Trouble—much trouble," he panted. "Shansi men make talk to officers. Not much like to move. They say have no umbrellas like Kuominchun soldiers."

"Umbrellas me eye!" snapped Thompson, looking in the direction of the rebellious units. "We've had that umbrella argument before. They know I won't clutter up their equipment with these trick paper bumbershoots when they've all got pup tents. They're scared of a fight, these yellow Shansi birds, that's all. We'll have to brace 'em up some, I guess. Henry, run down to the Slovaks' quarters and tell Colonel Zatkoff I want to see him right away."

The bulky aide was gone again into the night filled with snow-flakes and an ominous rumble of voices. Thompson paced back and forth before the tent of Hwang, who was jabbering gloomily to himself. The vague fear of death in this Chinese horde was being crystallized by the definite prospect of a conflict. Battle orders had transferred this fear to the unknown, unseen enemy. Unless it were checked, it would soon outweigh the natural Chinese fear of authority.

When Henry Pu Ting trotted back, his almond eyes were almost round with fearful excitement. Blood streamed from a gash in his cheek.

"Hurt, Henry?"

"Broken glass, sir. Colonel and friends drinking *sam-shui.*"

"Well?"

"Very bad, sir. Colonel say if general want to see him right away, general must come himself."

Henry scanned his general's face, which seemed unimpressed by this news of fresh insubordination.

"Shall order out guard, sir, to bring colonel?" he asked.

Thompson did not reply at once. He listened to the vast grumble of growing disorder, still in a loquacious stage. It had taken a trifle to stir up this impressionable Chinese throng; it would take only a suggestion to restore discipline. Thompson had been counting on the contagion of courage—or at least a healthy respect for authority—from his handful of Europeans. Now the Russians showed signs of mutiny. But to attempt to reduce them by disciplinary measures would only increase the confusion.

"Never mind the guard," said Thompson at last. "I'll go."

HE ENTERED Zatkoff's tent quietly. "Colonel," he said determinedly, "you will take your post immediately."

The bearded Russian officer laughed with peculiar exultation, and spoke in Russian to half a dozen comrades seated about an improvised table on which were earthenware jugs and porcelain bowls. He turned his back on Thompson.

"If my dope is straight," continued the American, ignoring Zatkoff's attitude, "we'll get a peppering tonight. You probably know about it already, you've been such good friends with Kifer. But the fact remains that you'll have to be on hand to return the compliment as soon as things begin to pop."

"No, Thompson, no. Enough foolishing. We are out, through, finish, quit. You try to domination us by teaching to hate us the Chinese. God knows we hate them enough. But tonight they are forgotten us. They hate you because there is to be a battle. So we leave you with your Chinese."

Zatkoff leered through the tobacco smoke at Thompson, who shook the snow off his coat as though to express his reaction.

"Try and leave," said Thompson defiantly. "You're like most mercenaries, I know, grab your pay as long as there's nothing doing, and clear out as soon as there's any risk to your skin. You call yourselves White Russians, but you ain't so white. I paid you birds for this campaign, and if you don't deliver the goods, I'll help myself. Try and cheat me, and I'll have the whole bunch shot."

Again Zatkoff laughed.

"You cannot," he snickered. "This is not a real army. No authority you have, no government, nothing. You only play at war, and you play bad. You are only *mujik* masqueraded like general. Look at me, Baron Zatkoff, Baron and officer of the Tsar. Better you had take off the hat when addressing your betters."

The Russians tittered.

"Listen, Zatkoff." Thompson was pale in his attempt to keep his temper. "Don't start anything here. It ain't healthy to get up on your ear right in the middle of four thousand Chinks. Are you or ain't you going to take orders?"

"I say to you what Cambronne said to the English!" bellowed Zatkoff. His comrades guffawed.

The color rushed back into Thompson's face, until his auburn eyebrows stood out as white against an angry red. In two strides he was standing above the seated Russian. He seized his black beard in both hands and yanked him to his feet.

"Stand up when you address superior officers?" cried the ex-sergeant.

The leer froze on the Russian's face. He lunged, but Thompson was too close, and the two men clinched. There was a scuffle. Fists flew for a moment. In the confusion there was the flash of polished steel in the lamp-light. Then Zatkoff stepped back with a cry, painfully trying to pull his wrist free from the twisting grasp of Thompson. A revolver lay at his feet. The ex-sergeant's gaudy head-gear was gone, and his red hair bristled. Putting his whole weight behind his right arm, he swung his fist to the point of Zatkoff's bearded jaw, simultaneously releasing his hold on the Russian's wrist. Zatkoff reeled against the center pole, and then fell through the side of the tent.

The noise of the struggle had brought a crowd of jabbering Chinese soldiers, who looked on eagerly. To them this discord between Europeans, between officers, meant the end of order and discipline. Tonight there would be open mutiny. There would be no more commands, no battle, no spectre of death. Tomorrow there would be looting. Tomorrow the world would be changed. Yes, even the hated Russian was no longer overbearing now; he was on the ground, stirring slowly, extricating himself from the fallent tent. As his bearded, arrogant face appeared, a Chinese soldier sprang forward, a bayonet in his hand.

There was a detonation, the bayonet dropped, and the Chinese was writhing on the ground, holding his arm.

"Enough of this tommy-rot!" shouted Thompson. "Where's Henry Pu Ting?"

The interpreter came sheepishly from somewhere in the shadows.

Thompson made a sweeping gesture with his revolver in the direction of the crowd, now more numerous, but strangely quiet.

"Tell these men, Henry," he said, "that I am still No. 1 boss around here. Tell 'em to get back to their units at once. Anybody found wandering around in fifteen minutes will be shot on sight."

Henry lost his sheepishness, and threw back his head slightly as he intonated the translation.

"And I want two men to take this wounded man to have his arm set."

Two soldiers stepped forward promptly.

Zatkoff, who had risen stiffly, watched the squirming Chinese being carried off by his comrades. Then he stepped up to Thompson and saluted.

"The artillery will be ready to fire in ten minutes, General," he said.

Thompson nodded. Then he wiped his right eye with the back of his hand. There was a little blood on it.

THE snow had ceased about midnight. The Russian gunners were at their posts in the half-frozen slush of the hillside, consuming many samovars of tea to keep warm. Machine gunners and outposts were in position, and sentries were doubled. But there was no sign of an attack from Ping-chow. Thompson again began to think he was wrong in suspecting Kifer. Anyhow he would stick to his daylight agreement, unless he were attacked first.

As a noticeable thinning of the darkness announced that dawn was not far off, Thompson moved half his infantry over the crest, deploying his units in three successive lines on the down slope.

Night dissolved into a cloudy gray. Seven o'clock. In another hour he could begin his bombardment and still be in order with the agreement.

Then the crackle of rifle fire came from over the way. Men poured from the gates of Ping-chow, forming a ragged sort of front with the center on Ming Gate, shooting futilely.

This infantry attack without artillery preparation disoriented Thompson for a moment. He raised his binoculars to look at the hill of the Red Tower. He lowered them, breathed on the lenses and wiped them with his handkerchief. Then he looked again. The artillery he had seen the day before was gone. Suddenly he saw the many-storied Ming Gate rise, shake itself apart, and settle in a cloud of dust. The roar of an explosion followed a few seconds later. What was going on here? Thompson gave orders for his troops to open fire only when the first wave of the enemy charge came into range.

At the first burst of fire from Thompson's hillside, the enemy faltered, then broke, and fell back. Thompson's infantry moved forward cautiously, for the red-headed chief suspected a trap. But the retreating enemy made no attempt to re-enter Ping-chow, skirting the walls in its flight.

A few desultory volleys, and Thompson's advance party entered the city.

Half-an-hour later he entered it himself, accompanied by One-armed Hwang, who had regained his lost spirits.

Thompson was walking about the base of the Red Tower, looking for signs of the lost artillery and a possible ambush. His binoculars picked up a long supply train, moving down the river away from Ping-chow, as though for a carefully-prepared retreat. He was puzzling over this unexpected capitulation of the enemy, when two coolies reached the hilltop, carrying a motion picture camera. Behind them was Glenn Kifer in a sedan chair.

"I'll congratulate you in a minute, General," said Kifer as the chair-carriers put him down, "when I finish shooting that parade of jackasses. It'll make a pretty distance shot, with the walls of the city just cutting the foreground. I made some nice— General, where did you get that black eye?"

"I got it in the only fighting connected with the capture of Ping-chow," said Thompson drily. "Say, maybe you can tell me why this battle collapsed on us?"

Kifer grinned.

"You wanted too much money to blow up this hill," he said. "So I came over and got these birds to make a sortie and then retreat, all for $25,000 Mex. Of course, I missed the burning oil feature, but I got 'em to blow up the Ming Gate for a thousand extra. And I think I can get Helvington to pay for half of that. He was wanting to put a new road through there."

"Helvington? Say, that reminds me," said Thompson. "Come along and watch me occupy the Ping-chow telegraph office. I want to wire the Asiatic Bank in Tientsin to stop payment on a check.

"And say—do you think this black eye o' mine will show in that film you're making to run back in Saint Louis?"

Part Two

The Roaring TOWNS

By

HUGH PENDEXTER

Preceding events briefly retold

When the Union Pacific Railroad approached Cheyenne in 1867 a mushroom growth transformed it overnight into the wildest of the roaring railroad towns.

Lee Darby, a veteran of the Confederate Army, has fallen in with Fevernager, an old plainsman, and Baltimore, his partner. The Indians had killed Baltimore's parents when he was an infant, but had adopted him, bringing him up to manhood more Indian in mind and habit than white.

Fevernager and Baltimore are engaged in hunting, to supply the railroad camps with meat, and urge Darby to join them. Darby hesitates, telling them he will think it over, as he feels he ought tackle something that will yield larger returns.

Darby also meets and befriends Allen Gorl, an Eastern capitalist. Since Gorl has struck Cheyenne he has spent most of his time gambling and drinking. He consorts with Dollie, a Spanish dance-hall girl, and laughs at her conflicting impulses of avarice and affection. Gorl is a business genius, but he is intoxicated by the freedom and romance of the railroad towns. The vicious elements flatter him and carouse with him. Gorl realizes that only his wealth buys him immunity from these ruthless men.

Among these latter are: Elder Keen, an apostate Mormon, quiet but deadly; Jack Hays, a noisy braggart capable of any crime for profit; and Whisky Frank, a cowardly but natural-born killer. Elder Keen is the brains and leader of this crew.

There is bad blood between Keen's bad-men and Fevernager, Baltimore and Darby.

One evening Strawberry Sam, an old prospector, appears in a saloon with a fat pouch of gold, and allows he knows where there is plenty more. Keen takes him in hand, but can learn nothing from him regarding the location of his strike.

Sam finally leaves the saloon to look for his old friend, Fevernager. Gorl and Darby accompany the Spanish girl, Dollie, to aid a dying friend of hers.

As they come to the dance-hall where the sick girl lies, a shot is fired. They rush in and find Strawberry Sam mortally wounded by Whisky Frank.

As he is dying Sam motions to Darby to come to him. The killers press close; but Sam whispers in Darby's ear alone the secret that will set the frontier afire, the secret Darby is to deliver to Fevernager—that "The Black Hills is lousy with gold."

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A Story of Cheyenne when it was the Wildest of the Frontier Towns

CHAPTER THREE

TWO JOBS FOR DARBY

CHEYENNE was filling up for the winter. Workmen were in great demand at Camp Carlin in the work of erecting a dozen big warehouses. Temporary log huts were up for the enlisted men at Fort D. A. Russell and work was being rushed on the permanent barracks. Building in the town went on night and day. There was no need for any man to go without work; yet the idle element increased in numbers and viciousness.

From a man going to Camp Carlin to work as blacksmith Darby bought a good horse for a cheap price. He bought a Henry fifteen-shot repeater and a supply of .44 cartridges, as he considered it to be the best carbine used during the war. A knife and a Colt revolver completed his armament. He bid good-by to James Talbot at the brick-yard and looked around to find Gorl. But the Rhode Island man had won a sizable sum at roulette and was having a hectic time in losing it at faro and squandering it on his murderous sycophants. He did meet the Spanish girl during his search for Gorl, and her first words were: "You do not like me. I am sorry. I want you to do something for me."

"I'm going away at once. Anything I can do quickly I'll be glad to do. But why don't you ask Gorl?"

"I ask him and ask him. He will not listen. I ask him to keep away from Keen and those men, to stop gambling."

Puzzled, Darby queried, "Yes? And you'd have me do what?"

"Make Gorl stop his bad ways."

"Why, he wouldn't listen to me, Miss Dollie. I've urged him several times. He laughs at me, or gets angry. I've tried to see him alone to say 'good-by', but he's always surrounded."

"Where you going?" she demanded.

"To find an old plainsman, Fevernager. I prefer you don't repeat it, although I shall be on my way directly."

"*Jornado del muerto,*" she whispered.

He thought she referred to the desert of that name, and assured, "Not so far as that. It's a game country."

"'Journey of the dead,'" she slowly translated. "Don't go."

He started the following morning and was halted by Elder Keen near the edge of the town. Keen, on his way to his lodgings after a wild night, had noticed the horseman before Darby had suspected the apostate was abroad. Darby, now wearing his gun in his belt, reined in with one hand resting on his hip, and queried, "Well?"

Keen's tall thin figure, tightly encased in the long coat, resembled a ramrod as he stood erect, his hands resting on the handle of his umbrella, and stared sharply at the Southerner. "Are you going away for good?" he asked.

"Yes. No. I don't know. I may be back. Not that it's any of your business."

Keen raised a hand and fingered the buttons of his coat and regretted, "You taking poor Sam's secret to them who never earned it."

"You reckon Whisky Frank earned it by committing murder."

"Frank was taught a lesson. He knows how I feel about the killing," said Keen. "He'll be slow to make that mistake again. The fool thought poor Sam was drawing on him."

"From the top of your stovepipe to your heels you're a liar," quietly replied Darby. "The brute saw a chance to murder a drunken, inoffensive man, and he couldn't resist such on excellent opportunity. Of course you were angry over the killing as you had planned to get Sam's secret before cutting him off behind the ears. If ever you served with the Dainties in the old days you know what that means . . . Stop fiddling with that button. I know you have a gun under your coat as well as in the umbrella. I'll bore you the next move you make."

Keen's smile was ghastly, yet his voice was sincere as he clasped his bony hands on the umbrella handle and exclaimed, "Repeat Whisky Frank's mistake and kill a fortune? No, no. You're not foolish enough to believe that. You're more precious than pearls and much silver."

"All right. I'm carrying good insurance. Nevertheless you walk along." And he slipped from his horse and stood with the animal between him and the apostate. "Remember, this isn't Mountain Meadow," Darby added.

Keen's thin face grew livid. He had been active at that massacre and he would have given much, did he possess much, to know if it was a chance shot, or if the knowledge of his work on that terrible day was known in Cheyenne. For a few seconds he hesitated inwardly cursing the tightly buttoned coat, and yet realizing he could not afford to kill until Darby had passed the secret on to another. Darby watched him swing about and stiffly stride up the street, but he did not mount his horse until around a corner. Then he rode rapidly and with frequent backward glances.

FOR some time he watched his back track, expecting to see horsemen sweeping after him. Without detecting any signs of pursuit he sighted the camp on the head of the Little Crow at mid-day. There was a tent and a good camping outfit, but no signs of his friends. The light wagon and team of horses were missing. Knowing the hunters would be returning soon Darby picketed his horse and looked about. Several whisky barrels were filled with meat in the brine, waiting to be smoked. Thirty feet from the firehole and up the slope were three smoke-houses. Ten feet of the trench had been dug and Darby took pick and shovel to bring the trench down to the fire.

He worked for two hours, then paused to find and cook food. While eating Fevernager came in sight, driving the wagon-load of antelope and black-tail deer. On beholding the Southerner he stood up and gave a Crow war-cry and cracked the whip and came down the slope at a mad gallop. Arriving at the camp he leaped from the wagon, boisterously seized the Southerner's hands and jeered:

"Come to your needin's, eh? L'arned you didn't want a finnified business with that Eastern pilgrim cracking the whip."

"I'm glad to be here. Where's Baltimore?"

"Fetching in some elk on the mules. Been trifling with our smoke trench, huh? How's Gorl making it?"

"Rum, faro, women."

"They'll be putting him to bed with a shovel. Nothing to me. Don't like him.

Too uppity and pernickety. If spreein' don't kill him some bad man will chaw him up most bodaciously."

"He's his own worst enemy," sighed Darby. "Trailing with a bad crowd. After his money's gone he'll need friends. He has only one now."

"Don't like him. He lets that little Spaniard make a fool of him."

"The girl is his best and only friend, even while she's taking money from him," declared Darby. "She started in fleecing him, but she likes him. She'd save him from the men if she could. She's the best one of the gang he plays around with."

"And that ain't saying a big mouthful," sneered Fevernager.

"Not like you to say that. She's very young. She's what the railroad towns have made her. And she must die like the others, like the one they buried a few days ago."

"It ain't right. Ain't just. All wrong," mumbled Fevernager. "How's our old friend, Jack Hays, damn him?"

"Still living when I quit town. Vigilants will get him once they organize. But he's a cipher besides Elder Keen."

"Good land! That narrer old rattler in town. No doubt about him. Hays is a talky-talky bully. Wants folks to think he's a he-hellion on wheels. But the Elder's plumb bad. I hear mule-bells. There he comes."

Baltimore brought four pack-mule loads of elk meat. On sighting Darby he raised an open hand. On reaching the camp he shook hands warmly and in his slow speech asked, "How is the girl with the medicine hair?"

"The same. Get rid of the notion she's your sister."

"She can't be. My little sister would never be living in a tent in Cheyenne. You come to throw in with us?"

"If you really need me. Otherwise, no."

Fevernager then pointed to Darby's work on the trench. Baltimore smiled and assured, "We always need a good friend. You will earn your share. The meat's been in the brine nine days. It must be hung up in smoke. Fevernager, you make the supper. Darby and I will dig." Then he asked Darby:

"That big man, Lucky Gorl? Is his medicine still making him strong?"

"His medicine is weak. He follows a bad trail. Fevernager, I've brought a message to you from a dead man. It was meant for your ears alone. After hearing it you can tell Baltimore if you wish."

"From a dead man?" uneasily repeated Fevernager. "A ghost of a friend sends a talk to me?"

"Strawberry Sam. Came to Cheyenne a few days ago. Whisky Frank killed him. He brought some gold. He wouldn't tell the cutthroats where he found it. Before passing out he told me, so I could tell you."

"Poor old Sam! Them bloody devils wiped him out! Why, he was harmless as a rabbit. Well, I'll remember Whisky Frank," muttered the plainsman. Baltimore started to walk aside. Fevernager harshly called to him:

"Come back here, young uppity. Don't be so bodaciously perlite. Spit out your talk, Darby. What's poor Sam's last words?"

"That he found the gold in the Black Hills. He said there was a lot of it there." Fevernager did not appear to be much interested. He turned to Baltimore and remarked, "That's where your's came from, I'll bet a chaw of terbaccer."

"Gold can be found in many places," was the evasive response. "I've found it in the Big Horns. The Black Hills is a medicine place. The Sioux pass through them. They go there to get lodge-poles. *Wakautauka* comes there to rest. But his red children do not stay there. I've followed the trail through several times. But we did not stay to hunt. It's bad for white men to go there. The Thunders are always grumbling. Dakota men have been killed by the lightning. It's a medicine place."

Darby was amazed to discover this superstitious slant in the young man's thoughts. To test him further he asked, "Would you go there with Fevernager and me?"

Baltimore slowly shook his head, and repeated, "It's bad medicine."

"But Strawberry Sam went and stayed and returned safely."

"And he is a ghost," quickly reminded Baltimore. "White men will pay a big price for that gold."

"See here," began Fevernager; "I don't like to hear you talk like an Injun. You're a white man, Baltimore. You don't believe in that stuff. Darby here is keen to make some money. He's poorer 'n a prairie-dog.

I can take him there, but the Black Hills is a big place. Lacking any directions from Sam I wouldn't know where to look if I went with our friend. You want to tell us how to find Sam's diggings, or any diggings where we can find plenty of gold?"

Baltimore shook his head. "You are my friends. Why should I send you to death?"

"That gang in Cheyenne will go if they suspect Sam's secret. They'll go and bring back the gold," irritably remarked Darby. "I'm willing to take any chances. I must make money before I can go home."

"Before they go there they better learn a death-song. I brought gold away from there. Found it on my last trip through. Kept it for years. Then I threw it away. Threw it into Jack Hays' face. If I'd sold it I would have had bad luck. My medicine told me to throw it away."

"Well, that's finished," grumbled Fevernager. "No use trying to smoke a cold pipe. Not great use for gold myself; my trail's most ended. But Darby here is different. Young, wants a wife'n home, got to have money."

"It is because he is a friend I say keep away from a *wakan* place, where men become *heyoka,*" passionately insisted Baltimore. "Call it bad luck, if you understand that better. It's bad luck to go to the Black Hills. There is another place where there is gold. How much I don't know. Perhaps our friend can find his wife and home and money by going there. It is a medicine place of a very old people who have been ghosts for a very long time. We may have a fight with the Shoshoni, or Cheyennes, or some of the Dakotas, but the old ones have been dead so long their medicine must be weak. We may go there."

"Well, let's dig. The gold can wait and the meat can't," said Darby.

THE two worked industriously and by the time the steaks were broiled and the coffee was made the trench was completed and ready to tap the fire-hole. A shorter trench would have served except for danger of the smoke being too hot and hurting the meat. After supper the three men set about covering the trench with rock and dirt, transforming it into a flue. With this work finished there remained the work of butchering the day's kill.

Darby learned rapidly to use the knife as little as possible and separate the muscles with his hands so as to leave each chunk as nearly as possible in its natural form. When the carcasses had been made ready for the barrels the meat in the brine was taken out and hung in the smoke-houses. Before they could sleep it was necessary to make a new pickle with salt and put the fresh meat in the brine.

By this time Darby was realizing his friends were taking much greater pains than was exercised by the average hunter. The firehole was loaded with fuel to keep a stream of smoke pouring into the smoke-houses before they were permitted to sleep. Darby believed he had slept for only a few minutes when he was awakened by Fevernager cooking breakfast. Early rising was necessary for a hunter, and breakfast was finished by the time the revelers in Cheyenne were seeking rest. The work at hand consisted of stretching the green hides to dry, and the baling of those ready for the buyers of Oberne, Hosick & Company of Chicago. In commenting on this phase of the work the plainsman proudly remarked:

"They never find any damaged hides in our bales. Nor bones and gravel or dirt. We get full price. Lots of hunters try to cheat in weight by putting in rubbish. Ain't right, ain't just. Nothing fair about such tricks. And it never pays as they always open 'em up."

For several days Darby kept camp and kept the smoke pouring up the trench. He learned much about the commercial side of the work. Antelope and deer meat brought eight to ten cents a pound in Cheyenne. The dry hides brought from fifteen to twenty-five cents a pound. He learned why the first Western explorers were quick to use buckskin, as all tanned antelope and deer skins were termed. Baltimore said the Indians had no knowledge of a time when it was not used for clothing. It wore better than any fabric and was soft and pliable, and was a protective color for those in a hostile country, or endeavoring to draw close to timid game. It was easily obtainable when cloth could not be had. It was superior to cotton and woolen in preventing chills during inactivity following strenuous exertions.

Baltimore, on observing Darby's high opinion of buckskin, brought out an extra suit and insisted the Southerner accept it as a gift. Within half an hour he fell into the creek, and thus learned that soaked buckskin was a nuisance until properly dried. He was corrected by Baltimore for leaving it by the camp-fire. He was chided by Fevernager for spreading it out in the hot sun. Then his friends took pity on him and taught him to dry the garment gradually, and rubbing them often the while. To dry quickly, or to neglect the rubbing, would cause the dressed skins to become stiff and greatly shrunken.

Moulding bullets, reloading shells, working many hours a day and sleeping few, did not dampen Darby's ardor, although he could not see how his labors would lead to any sizeable rewards. His ambition was to make his "pile" and return to Louisiana and buy a plantation and rest and read. Since the day of his enlistment he could not remember a time when he could take a book into the shade and read and sleep. He would have been in a better frame of mind if not for Strawberry Sam's last words. He resented the red streak in Baltimore's mind, which opposed a trip into the medicine hills. He was convinced Fevernager would not seek the gold without the young man. He was not the type to covet gold, or to indulge in back-breaking labor to procure it. All the plainsman asked of life was whisky, tobacco, buckskin, and enough to eat. Did he possess millions his ambition would not go beyond these simple wants.

Baltimore explained they could make several thousand dollars apiece during a season. This was better than Darby had accomplished since the end of the war. He had failed to make money in the Colorado towns. He had lacked capital to take advantage of land speculation in Cheyenne. Odd jobs had paid him little better than a good living. But now he knew the Black Hills were "lousy with gold," and he was eager to risk life for a chance at it. Strawberry Sam's homely avowal kept running through his mind. The danger was nothing to a man who had gambled with death for four years for the sake of an idea. He had considered the dead prospector's message a scared trust, but as he brooded over Baltimore's refusal and Fevernager's indifference he began to wonder if he were not morally free to seek the new diggings.

One day he remarked as much to Baltimore, putting it as a question. He was promptly told, "Your life is your own. If you want to throw it away hunting gold in the Black Hills you have a right to do so. I tell you not to do it. But you have the right. By and by I can take you to another place, in the Big Horns, where there is gold. How much I don't know. It isn't a medicine spot now. Many winters ago it was a strong medicine place. But that was very far back, when very little men lived in the mountains. They were cannibals. The Shoshones tell stories about them. Their medicine is dead."

Darby then wished that Allan Gorl had kept clear of evil companions. If the Rhode Island man had remained a hard-headed builder he would have been an excellent one to finance a big expedition. He kept playing with the notion of Gorl ceasing his dissipation and returning to the rôle which had made him "Lucky" Gorl. One morning Fevernager told him:

"We reckon you can be best spared to take a load of hides and smoked meat to Cheyenne."

Darby was surprised to find how gladly he welcomed the suggestion. He had set Gorl down as one hopelessly committed to the wild life, and yet in the back of his head he was picturing him as reformed and capable of planning a successful penetration of the Sioux country.

When within a mile of Cheyenne he met a broken-down gambler, known as "Deuce." The man hung on the skirts of the parasites usually surrounding Gorl. On recognizing the Southerner, Deuce reined in and joyfully exclaimed, "Luck's came back to me—trip is ended quick."

"You can't be looking for me," Darby increduously remarked.

"But I am. And I ride a horse same's Gorl plays poker. Never believed any woman could hook me for this job, but she did."

"You're bringing me a message from a woman?" asked Darby.

"From the little Spaniard. The one Gorl calls 'Dollie'. She can't write English good and her talk is by word of mouth. Here it is. 'Tell the man Lee Darby that Allan Gorl needs a friend as he never needed one before.' That's it. I kept cases on it till I had it by heart. Get it?" And he began turning his horse impatient to be back in town, away from the open spaces which oppressed him.

"Just a minute. Where were you riding to find me?"

"Head of the Little Crow. I was to follow it into Colorado if necessary."

"How did she know where to send you?"

"Ask me something easy. Ask her when you see her. I'm lonesome out here. In a hurry to get back."

"What's the matter with Gorl?"

Deuce shook his head impatiently, and said, "Drinking rum, plunging at the tables, same's ever. Nothing else I know of. Now I must be going."

"You'll see the Spaniard before I do. Tell her I'll look her up." Deuce nodded and was off at a gallop to return to his favorite saloon and gambling-hall.

THREE hours later Darby had finished his business and was asking for the Spanish girl in the tent back of the Overland Stage office. He waited at a table until word could be taken to her. When she came hurrying to him he was amazed at the sorrow, or fear, in her face.

"You come queeck," she greeted.

"Runt of a gambler met me outside the town. Said Gorl was in trouble. Where is he, and what's he been doing?"

"He has lost ver' much money at the tables. I tried to stop him."

"You've been ready enough to encourage him," he sternly accused.

"Not now. I try to make him stop."

"When he stops it's good-by to you from Mr. Gorl," he cynically reminded.

"It is nothing," she muttered. "I try to make him stop." He stared in bewilderment for a moment as he saw a new expression in her down-cast eyes, and a color suffusing her thin face that made paint unnecessary for the moment.

"You little fool, you've fallen in love with him," he blurted. Then hastily, "Where is he? What do you want me to do? What do you think I'm able to do?"

"Elder Keen and Whisky Frank, and one called 'Browney', took him away to the hills twenty miles west of here. They call the place Robbers' Roost. It is ver' bad. I want you to bring him back. He is not himself in the head."

"Why did they take him away? Why did he go?"

"Something about money. He lose mos' all he got. They want to keep him in the hills till they get the rest. He was ver' drunk. So he went."

"After he sobers up he'll be back," he said.

She shook her head. "They will get a paper from him. They will get his money. Then—"

"Well?" he prompted, yet knowing what her answer would be.

"They'll keel him!" she whispered; and her dark eyes grew round and big with terror.

Darby scowled and drummed his fingers on the table. His mind was cleared of all foolish notions of Gorl reforming and being in position to organize any expedition to the Black Hills. He was angry at Gorl because the fanciful dream could not become a fact. He began, "Young woman, you know Gorl and I aren't working in double-harness any longer. You didn't like the arrangement when we were. I've formed a new partnership and owe much to my new partners. I'm supposed to return at once to them."

She hung her head and slowly turned to leave him. "What makes you think they'll harm him?" he asked, resenting her dejection because it made him feel uncomfortable.

"They will surely keel him once they get the paper," she replied. "That Elder Keen never stops when he follows one. He is the Evil One." And she shivered as if cold.

"How did you know where to send for me?" he suddenly remembered to ask.

She monotonously told him, "The young man who lived with the Indians told me where you worked—I mus' go back."

"You wait a minute," he savagely insisted. "Why should I find Gorl and fetch him back for you and your crowd to rob?"

She threw out her hands in a little gesture of helplessness that made him uneasy, and answered, "I will never rob him again. That's all."

"Over modest," he muttered.

She lifted her head and stared at him steadily, perhaps for his phrase to filter through her mind. Then she told him, "He tried to help you in beezness. He opens his big hands and his money flies away like birds. He is the firs' man to be good to me—Good-by."

Now she was retiring in earnest. He

wrathfully told himself a woman from Bitter Creek had no right to humanize her emotions. He rapped angrily on the table. He was scowling savagely as she wheeled to face. She read something behind the scowl and without approaching him she eagerly whispered, "You will go?"

He nodded and abruptly left the place to secure a horse and a second revolver. He found himself laughing aloud in ironical derision of the situation. Baltimore would not lead him to the gold hidden in the Black Hills for fear of the harm that might come to him. Now he was foolishly committed to an enterprise which was bound to bring him face to face with death even if he had all the luck.

He was doubly irritated as he swiftly covered the three miles to Fort Russell. The Rhode Island man's plight had destroyed all fanciful plans for a big expedition to the gold country. Although an eminently practical man by mental habits and hard experience Darby had played with the notion until against all logic he had built up an expectation that somehow Gorl was to be the key to unlock the hills of gold. In a minor degree he was displeased to be taken from his work by the transient sentimentality of a dance-hall girl. Keen and his associates had been after Gorl's money from the start. As he neared the high bluff on which stood Fort Russell he was trying to persuade himself that the hysterical girl had overestimated Gorl's danger, and to believe the rascals would never harm a man who scattered money so recklessly.

He reined in on gaining the elevated ground and stared back at Cheyenne, a block of small boxes and suggesting a toy village. Facing the fort he swept his gaze over the magnificent stretch of prairie on one side and the long, low serrated range of the Laramie Hills on the other. At this time this range was often called the "Black Hills," but were not to be confused with the unexplored hills of the same name where Strawberry Sam had claimed he had found his gold. Darby was strongly tempted to forego his errand. The lonely ride to the west could scarcely be completed before dark. The Southerner was sick of fighting. He moodily watched the soldiers and civilian employees erecting company barracks of pine boards stood on end and battened inside and out. The officers were living in tents and from among these walked a tall man wearing a long military cloak lined with red. He presented a conspicuous figure and Darby recognized him as the commandant.

Dismounting and leading his horse Darby approached him. He had a nebulous idea of shifting the disagreeable business to a file of soldiers. He had talked with the commandant once in Cheyenne and it was the result of the impression he then had made that caused the general to invite him to accept service as a secret agent. The commandant recognized him and was stiffly cordial, saying:

"You've reconsidered and come to help round up some of the lawless trash, Darby?"

"I'm scarcely able to do that, General. I'm riding to get an Easterner out of the clutches of some men who need very much to be killed. But once I get my man I must hasten back to join my partners. The man I seek is near Granite Cañon. Called Robbers' Roost."

The commandant's eyes sparkled. "Indeed! Who's the man you would rescue? How did he get into bad hands? How will you extricate him?"

"Allan Gorl. Taken from Cheyenne while confused by heavy drinking. By shooting, if necessary."

"Gorl? He talked with me about some contracts. Impressed me as a man who could go far out here. But shooting, Darby? Will that be necessary, or justified? Was he kidnapped, or led away while drunk?"

"The men who took him are Elder Keen, a renegade Mormon; Whisky Frank, thoroughly worthless and vicious, and a minor villain."

"Shooting will be excellent for the three of them!" heartly agreed the commandant. "But I should send some men along to make it more regular."

"I know two of the rascals. I know their bloody technique. If soldiers went and they had warning they wouldn't hesitate a second to kill Gorl and dispose of the body if they believed that course would be best. When I reached this plateau I was strongly tempted to turn the whole affair over to you. My reasons were thoroughly selfish. Now I know I should go on alone."

"Very well. Most of the enlisted men

are wild Irish. The devil himself can't scare them, but they lack in finesse. If my young officers knew of your mission it would need peremptory orders to hold them back. But one man against three! The odds are too great."

"I'm cautious, General. Having quit the war alive I find myself quite precious. But the more I think of it the more I'm convinced there will be no offer of violence."

The commandant stared toward the west for a bit, then decided. "Very well. But if you're not back here by to-morrow afternoon I'll send a squad to look you up."

Darby thanked him and continued on his way. Despite his assurance to the contrary he knew his venture was desperate and that much depended on luck. It was what the Spanish girl would call, "The journey of the dead." He pressed his mount so he might arrive at dusk and take the desperadoes by surprise. If sighted before gaining the rendezvous they might try an ambush. To offset such forebodings was the recollection of Keen's desire to learn Strawberry Sam's secret. He would be loath to kill the man who held that secret. Keen was no more deadly than many of his associates but he stood above them in using his head. Jack Hays, Whisky Frank, and their like were content to do murder for the price of carouse. Keen was one to hold in check his feral impulses if, by waiting, he stood a chance of winning big stakes. Yet Darby disliked the business and wished he had not undertaken it. He ridiculed himself for being influenced into going by a woman, "from Bitter Creek," as women of the little Spaniard's type were commonly called.

LONG'S PEAK lifted its white summit far off on the left. On the right Laramie Peak was watching him. Every mile found him more angry with his occupation. He was not Gorl's keeper. It was not his duty to abandon his business and his partners to rescue pilgrims who persisted in getting into trouble. This state of mind turned to cold rage against Keen and all the evil he stood for by the time he entered a narrow ravine some five miles from the fort. He met no one, saw no one, as he entered the desolation of the broken country. It was dusk when he finally came to the entrance of the cañon that housed Robbers' Roost. Glancing up against the skyline he found the stunted pines high up on both sides of the pass to be spies leaning forward to watch him.

The gathering night and the bleak aspect of the country depressed him. He dismounted and led his horse over the rough path and again wondered that he should be there. Since he finished with war he had been driven by the one desire to make a decent amount of money and live as quietly as possible. With a rare oath he pressed on to find the wolves' den.

Suddenly he turned a bend in the path and beheld a yellow blob of light ahead. It promised action and his depression vanished. His rage boiled hot against Keen and his companions, not so much for the kidnapping of Gorl as for interrupting the business of Fevernager, Baltimore and Darby. He halted and made sure his army revolver and the new weapon, a Colt thirty-six, new model navy, were in readiness, and walked forward. The distance was deceptive because of the night. While thinking the light was well removed a horse whinnied from some hidden corral and the light was blotted for a moment by a figure before it. He was a bit startled to discover he had arrived. He heard an animal moving close by and soon located the rough corral and swung the trunk of small pine one side so his own horse could enter. Without pausing to remove the saddle he made for the log cabin and was at the door when it opened a trifle and Elder Keen's voice was demanding:

"Who is it? Quick, or I shoot."

Darby stood to one side and answered, "Message for Gorl. Very important. Open up."

For a count of ten there was silence; then Keen answered, "Messages are very good. But who fetches it?"

"Lee Darby," snapped the Southerner.

Keen threw open the door and stood stiffly erect, one hand thrust inside the bosom of his long black coat. It was the first time Darby had seen him with his hat off, and without his umbrella. Behind him, and well back in the room, stood Whisky Frank and the third man. The features of the last would not be discernible in broad day because of the heavy whiskers and long hair. With his eyes on Keen's long, thin face Darby stepped fully into the light and placed a foot on the threshold. He stood there a few seconds, poised.

For a bit Keen ranged his gaze over the Southerner's shoulder to discover if he came alone. Then he slowly stepped back and Darby briskly entered the room.

Whisky Frank muttered an ugly exclamation and rested his hand on the handle of a short ax that was stuck in the wall. The hairy-faced man snarled, "What's this mean? Who'n hell's this feller? You fellers know him?"

"Just a friend of Gorl's," explained Darby, throwing off his hat. "Came ahead of the soldiers. Still drunk and sleeping, eh?" And he glanced at the figure on a pile of robes in one corner. His gaze was quick to take in paper, pen and ink on an empty hardtack box.

Keen, erect as a ramrod, faced him and whispered, "Soldiers? Why should soldiers come up here?"

"After Gorl," explained Darby and taking a seat on a section of a log that served as a stool. "You with the whiskers see if I left the corral tight. It was dark and I may have left it so my horse can get out."

The man addressed glared murderously at the Southerner. Keen's eyes narrowed, but his voice was almost suave as he said, "You heard the gentleman, Brownie. Make sure the corral bar is up. Darby, why should soldiers come here for Gorl? What has he done to bring soldiers after him? I don't understand it."

"His friends in Cheyenne, big railroad men, are afraid he'll kill himself drinking. Sent word to Fort Russell. Commandant is sending soldiers. Jumped on me when I reached town this morning and asked me to ride ahead of the soldiers and get him sobered up enough to sit on a horse."

Keen slowly withdrew his hand from his bosom and rubbed his thin palms together softly and murmured, "I see. I see. Our friend has powerful friends. They are afraid he will kill himself drinking. I see. And just when will the soldiers arrive, Darby?"

Darby pursed his lips and appeared to be musing. "About midnight, I should judge, if they don't stop to make a camp. If they make a camp it will be early tomorrow morning."

With his hands clasped behind him Keen paced the length of the low room several times. Whisky Frank remained close by the ax stuck in the wall, his eyes continually shifting from his chief to the Southerner, and back again. Keen came to a halt a few feet from Darby, and suddenly brought down a long finger as if it were a gun, and aiming it at Darby's chest he demanded:

"How did you and the others know where Gorl was?"

Darby promptly replied, "Manager of Rogers & Company's branch bank told me Gorl had gone with you twenty miles west to a place called Robbers' Roost. I knew the general direction. At Fort Russell they told me just how to come."

Keen showed his teeth in a sceptical grin and asked, "How'd the bank man know? How did the soldiers know?"

Darby smiled and suggested, "Better ask them. Maybe Jack Hays, or some of your other friends told them. Why does it matter?"

"It doesn't." As he spoke Brownie came padding in and reported:

"Corral's tight."

"Good. Now you get on your nag and ride east for three miles. Watch for a campfire. After covering three miles you hustle back whether you see soldiers, their campfire, or nothing. Don't spare your horse going and returning." The man at once obeyed. Keen turned to Darby and explained:

"The soldiers might lose their way."

"A lieutenant, who gave me directions says he knows the way. But what about something to eat?"

"Of course. Frank, set out some meat and some of that poor bread you made. And while we brought Gorl here to sober him up we have some whisky for those who know how to handle it."

"Thanks, Elder. But not on an empty stomach. Who'd a thought you and I would meet so soon again, and up here? Gloomy looking place at night."

"A very gloomy place even in the daytime, my young friend," added Keen, and he seated himself on a block of wood. "And what a number of anxious friends Gorl has! I fetch him here to sober him up. You come to help. Soldiers are coming. Everyone knows about his being here. Just as if it was printed in the *Leader*. Probably some of the young women in Cheyenne know it." He was watching Darby closely.

"Maybe. I don't know. Hardly reached town before the manager of the bank met me and asked me to take the ride." As he finished he rose and advanced to the corner and seized Gorl by the shoulder and shook him roughly. Keen started as if to rise and interfere, but kept his seat. Gorl groaned and rolled on his back.

Darby faced Keen and explained, "He was that still I was afraid he had died."

"What if he had if he knows no better than to poison himself with whisky?" asked Keen.

"Small loss so far as I'm concerned. But it would be mighty awkward for you and your friends."

"Hell and damnation! What are you talking?" Despite the oaths Keen's voice was scarcely audible.

Darby returned to his stool and explained, "They'd probably hang you and your friends for murder. Gorl has very powerful friends."

Keen's thin face grimaced convulsively, but there was no edge to his voice as he mused, "That's a very bad talk to make to Elder Keen, sir. Very bad. But there may be some truth in it. The fool kills himself and his friends blame others. You're welcome to Gorl. We don't want the bother of him when it brings a risk of being misjudged. He'll be a nuisance to any one who tries to care for him. He will drink and he can't handle his liquor."

Darby lowered his gaze to conceal his new suspicion and remarked, "I'll be bothered with him to the extent of taking him back to Cheyenne as soon as he can sit on a horse."

"We'll be glad to have him go. There's a small matter of a debt between him and me. After that's squared he can't leave any too quick to suit us."

DARBY rose and stepped to the box and glanced down at the indecipherable scrawl on a sheet of paper, and remarked, "Too drunk when he tried that. Just how much are you trying to get out of the poor fool?"

"Thirty thousand dollars, damn you!" exploded Keen, his erect body seeming to elongate as he glared at the Southerner.

"The exact amount he's probably just shifted from the Julesburg bank to Rogers & Company's branch in Cheyenne," murmured Darby.

"The exact amount I loaned him when he was trying to break a faro bank in Curly's place," sternly said Keen.

"All of us boys chipped in to stake him," spoke up Whisky Frank.

Darby laughed silently and continued, "You were generous to him. And after he gives an order for the money, you, Elder, will go and collect while Frank and the monkey-faced man stay here and nurse Gorl."

Before Keen could make reply Whisky Frank exclaimed, "Of course we would. He ain't able to care for himself, or find his way back alone."

"Do you really expect the Elder would return, or wait for you to reach Cheyenne, and then give you any of the money?" asked Darby.

Keen darted a hand inside the breast of his coat, but Darby had anticipated the move and covered him with his service revolver.

"Frank's behind you!" hoarsely warned Keen.

"We won't mind Frank. I'll pull trigger if I'm shot through the heart," said Darby. Then he shifted his position so he could watch Whisky Frank with sidelong glances. The desperado had not pulled his gun, but stood gaping at the two as if undecided what to do.

Darby continued, "Frank's wondering if you haven't been making a fool of him. He's suspecting you never intended he should have a cent of any money you might get out of this game. Pull your hand from your coat, slowly."

Keen obeyed, his silent rage twisting his long face into a grotesque mask. Gorl tossed from side to side, groaned loudly and slowly rose to a sitting posture. Darby dropped his hand to his side to hide the revolver. Gorl stared blankly for a few moments; then cried, "Lee Darby? Or another dream?"

"I'm real enough," assured Darby. "Your friends in Cheyenne are uneasy about you and want you to return. Get up and douse water over your head and see if you can keep on a horse."

Gorl was sick and very querulous. "I wouldn't ride to Cheyenne for a fortune. Is it early morning, or early night? How long have I been sleeping? How'd you happen to come here, Darby? Where's the whisky?"

Keen's lips parted in a grin as he encouraged, "Jug's in the corner, Allan."

As Gorl swung his head about Darby fired from the hip, shattering the jug. The explosion of the heavy gun caused the Rhode Island man to jump convulsively and twisted a sharp yelp from Whisky Frank. The latter howled in rage as he saw the liquor spreading over the floor. Keen drew a deep breath and hissed:

"You come here unasked to stick your nose into something that don't concern you. You spill good liquor when there's a man here who's in desperate need of a drink."

"Darby, you had no business to do that!" Gorl passionately cried. "What's wrong between you and my friends?"

Then he was on his knees and trying to salvage a drink from the fragments of the jug. Darby eyed him with disgust and said, "Allan Gorl, you've dropped mighty low and hard. Can't you understand these *friends* brought you here drunk and planned to keep you drunk until they had secured what cash you have in the Cheyenne bank. You've even made one try to write an order on the bank." And he pointed to the sheet of paper on the box. "Once they got your money they would have cut your throat. And you, poor fool, have played into their hands. I'm here to save your life if I can."

Gorl staggered to his feet and stared about the room. "You're worked up," he mumbled. "You think things sober that I'd never dream of when drunk."

Keen came forward a step and insisted, "Allan, you must choose between us and this man. He tells you horrible things about us. They say in Cheyenne he was anxious to get some of your money. We add to that, that he's a liar. But you must choose."

Gorl rubbed his head and stared at the broken jug and muttered, "Whisky's gone. No use staying here. But I ain't throwing any of you fellows. You don't like each other. That's because you misunderstand each other. You're all good friends. But, Darby, you were damned meddlesome when you broke the jug. I'm fair sick and a drink would have been medicine to me. We'll forget hard words and all ride back to town together."

Keen folded his arms and slowly shook his head, and said, "I'll not ride with a man who's insulted me. Go with him if you will. We'll settle our business and part friends."

"Business?" And Gorl blinked his eyes in an effort to remember.

"The money I loaned you at the tables last night in Cheyenne. I had won heavily and you had lost. You started to give me an order on the bank before you went to bed. Don't you remember?" And he pointed to the paper on the box. Then he added, "That's what this man has been making such a fuss about: an honest debt between friends."

Gorl shook his head and sighed, "I can't remember. But your word's good enough, Elder. I wish, Darby, you'd been more temperate in your talk. It's pretty harsh in you to say any of my friends would cut my throat." Darby made no reply. Gorl continued, now addressing Keen:

"I'll pay back the loan in cash, Elder. No need to draw an order on the bank." And he began hunting through his pockets for the usual fat roll of greenbacks. "Why, I haven't a cent!" he cried.

"Of course not. Or why would you need to borrow of me. You plunged heavily. You were cleaned out. You lost all my winnings into the bargain," quietly explained Keen.

"That's right," agreed Gorl. "I didn't need to borrow if I had money on me. How much?" And there was something of the old business-like curtness in his voice.

Keen hesitated for a few seconds. Darby's presence had spoiled his chance of going the limit. "Ten thousand dollars," he crisply replied.

Gorl was amazed. Darby laughed derisively, "Not ten thousand cents, Gorl," he jeered. "That skunk never saw a thousand dollars of his own money."

Keen suddenly clapped a hand on Gorl's shoulder and swung the big man in front of him as if he had been a boy, and cried, "Now, Frank!"

Darby wheeled and covered the desperado, who promptly stuck up his hands. He quickly shifted back to face Keen, but the latter had the barrel of a forty-four resting over Gorl's shoulder.

Gorl made no effort to escape the hand gripping his shoulder. He was confused and frightened. "Good God! Not that! No murder! What's the matter with you fellows? If you say I owe you ten thousand, your word goes, Keen. I remember nothing of that night. If this affair stops here and now I'll write you an order, or you can go with me to the bank and get it when we reach Cheyenne."

"I prefer the order. I'm afraid of your friend. Lower your gun, Frank, but keep it ready. Darby, put up your weapon. I'm in the driver's seat now."

Darby thrust his revolver into the holster, but earnestly warned Gorl, "If you sign any order it'll be your death warrant."

"Sha'n't I drill him, Elder?" eagerly asked Whisky Frank. Darby did not turn about, but watched Keen. The latter shook his head, insisting, "We are not killers. We've been insulted beyond all limits, but I want only my money back."

"No bloodshed!" cried Gorl. "What are you thinking of, Frank? I'll sign the order." And he walked to the box and slowly seated himself on a fireplace log and picked up the pen. The Elder stood with folded arms, one hand holding the forty-four ready of instant action.

Outside a horse stumbled. A voice called out, "Here we are!"

Keen glared at the door and the revolver vanished inside his coat. He had recognized the voice of Brownie and knew the loud tone was to give him warning. Gorl came to his feet. Whisky Frank put up his gun. The door flew open and a young lieutenant entered, followed by three Irish troopers. One of the men was pushing the hairy-faced man before him.

Keen smiled pleasantly and said, "You've succeeded in finding the soldiers and bringing them here, Brownie. Well done!"

The lieutenant stared at the four men and demanded, "Who's been shooting? We heard a shot."

"Mr. Darby doesn't approve of his friend drinking and busted the jug. Sorry, I can't offer you and your brave fellows some good liquor, Lieutenant," Keen regretted.

CHAPTER FOUR

FRANK AND BALTIMORE TRAVEL

DARBY and Gorl returned with the soldiers to Fort Russell, where Gorl remained for a few days to rest. The arduous ride, following his debauch, left him in a much weakened condition. Keen and his two companions remained at the Roost. Darby, anxious to get back to work, lost no time in returning to Cheyenne. Before parting with Gorl he warned him:

"Don't think for a moment you've finished with Keen. He'll insist on a slice of that thirty thousand in Rogers' bank."

With a mirthless laugh Gorl confessed, "I've made a big hole in that thirty thousand. Must have been completely crazy as well as a damn fool. You've done me a mighty neighborly turn. Do me one more. See Dollie and say I'm coming to town in a few days."

"I'll do that," agreed the Southerner. "But I earnestly advise you not to let those wolves know you've drawn the money from the bank. When they believe you're broke they'll act bad."

"They can't scare me. I'm not afraid of them when I've got my wits, and they won't catch me in that fix again. And I'm not through with making money. It's all bosh about Keen letting me have any money. My mind's blank as to what happened that night, but Keen never had any money, wouldn't lend if he had. The proprietor would have staked me if I'd gone broke. Of course his friends will swear he did. I'll have to compromise. It'll be my punishment for losing my head."

"You're losing more'n money by losing your head," said Darby.

"Don't preach. I make mistakes as all men do. I pay for them, which some men don't. I'm ready to settle with Keen at a low figure if he returns."

"He'll return," grimly assured Darby. "He's a blood-hound."

He found Cheyenne facing a reign of terror, following a bloody fight between two bands of desperadoes. Two men were dead and buried in the new cemetery, and several were nursing serious wounds. One only had to walk along the streets to learn that the citizens were highly incensed by the lawlessness. Darby followed an angry group of men to "City Hall," as the big upper room on 16th street, between Eddy and Thomas, was called. Other honest men were there, loudly denouncing the wave of crime which threatened to engulf the town.

"Before the Territory of Dakota can

send us judges and establish courts we'll all have our throats cut," insisted one citizen.

Nate Boswell, drug-store proprietor, replied, "We're strong enough to subdue the roughs in this town. We must keep order until a court and judge arrives."

"A committee of vigilants is the proper medicine for the lawbreakers," urged another.

The mass meeting for organizing the county already had been held and the election was scheduled for October 8th, a few days away. The gathering at the hall was intended for a discussion of the whole political situation, but the double homicide kept the talk largely on the disregard for all decency and order.

"Once you've elected a sheriff he can swear in enough deputies to rid us of the ruffians," spoke up Darby. "That will be better than a vigilants' committee."

"Maybe," dubiously replied the citizen who believed in vigilants. "But in other new towns the sheriff has had it hard to find enough men to serve as deputies. Desirable men for the job had their business affairs to attend to."

"If I'm elected sheriff I'll be glad to have you for a deputy, Darby," announced D. J. Sweeney.

"Swear in a dozen like Lee Darby and this town will be quiet as a Sunday-school," said James Talbot.

Darby flushed with embarrassment. He was no more unselfish than the others present. He had refused General Stevenson's invitation to act as secret officer in running down criminals. He said, "I'll do my part, but I could serve only long enough to clean house. The war left me broke and I must make some money."

"I think that's about the way all busy men feel," dryly remarked Boswell.

"I'll do as much as other men will," insisted Darby. "Off hand I'm thinking it would be a good plan to have the *Leader* publish a list of those who must quit town inside of twenty-four hours. The list can be made up by the sheriff the day he is elected."

"I don't know as that would be legal," said Sweeney. "It's combining the duties of a sheriff with the acts of a vigilance committee."

The man who had first urged the efficacy of such a committee loudly insisted, "Best and shortest way is to hang up a half dozen by the neck. That's the kind of medicine to spoon out to those rats."

Darby had no desire to be drafted onto any committee and he quietly withdrew to the street and went to the big tent to deliver Gorl's message to the Spanish girl. He found his errand was to take him farther. A bartender informed him the girl had gone to live with a family by the name of Dolin on the east side of the creek. His first thought was to send a written message to her, but feared for her ability to read English, although she spoke it well. Putting selfishness aside he tramped up to her boarding house, kept by an honest Irish couple.

The man who came to the door was larger even than Gorl and his huge figure quite filled the doorway. It was indicative of the times that he came armed. In one brawny hand he carried a spike-maul. His face was battered from many rough-and-tumble fights, and his blue eyes grew ugly as Darby announced his desire to speak with the girl.

"Git to hell outer here!" he roared.

"No, no, Señor Dolin!" cried the Spanish girl behind him. "This man is my friend."

"Ye poor thing ye've had too many of thim kind of friends," thundered the giant.

Darby reddened but felt no resentment. He told the Irishman, "You stay here and listen. If I say a word I wouldn't say to your daughter, or sister, you drop the maul on my head."

"I will that," readily promised Dolin as the girl appeared under his arm.

"My message is this," said Darby. "Gorl asked me to tell you he's resting up at Fort Russell and will probably be here to-morrow, or next day."

"You had trouble in getting him away?" she whispered. "Is he hurt?"

"Not much trouble. He'll be all right after a night's rest."

"Ye're talking about the man who's going to marry this little gurl?" barked Dolin.

The Spaniard's small oval face was tragic as she slowly nodded her head unseen by Dolin.

Darby replied, "Yes. That's the man. Some toughs were keeping him drunk in the hills. I went to fetch him back."

"Elder Keen and some of his men,"

muttered the girl, suppressing with difficulty a sob.

Dolin's eyes widened. "Glory be!" he exclaimed. "If ye had the guts to buck ag'in the Elder and bring this poor child's sweetheart away ye must be all right. Come in and meet the old lady. Come in and eat and pour a drink."

Darby excused himself. The girl impulsively reached forward and seized his hand. "You have been so good a friend," she murmured, and then ran back to the living-room.

Dolin rested a huge hand on Darby's shoulder and detained him while he said, "Me name's Mike Dolin. We come with the railroad to Pine Bluffs, then come on ahead to find better work. It was gitting too hard for the old lady. I believe ye're a white man. If ye ever need the help of a good spike-maul give a hoot, and if the Dolins is within hearing we'll come flying."

NOTHING now remained to deter Darby from returning to his partners. Securing his wagon and horses he started forthwith for the camp. On arriving he found his friends saddling their horses to start in search of him. They had been hunting during his absence, explained Fevernager, or he would have met them in Cheyenne. The two listened with great interest as the trip to Robbers' Roost was narrated. Then Baltimore said:

"That Gorl is poor flesh. You should have started shooting the minute you went through the door. After killing Keen and his men you should have turned Gorl loose to look out for himself. In another day we will take meat to town."

"Whole three of us!" exulted the plainsman. "Then let's see if any of them make-believe bad men have had war dreams."

Darby was sick of Cheyenne. "You two go. I'll stay here and keep the smoke going," he urged.

Baltimore shook his head. "All must go. If you stay here alone they will come after you. If you go alone they will kill you. You should have killed the three of them. But the three of us have a very strong medicine."

Fevernager beat a stick on a dry hide and sang the travel-song of the Kiowas. Baltimore revealed the abiding influence of his life with the red men when he picked up a stick and struck the hide to indicate he was ready to follow his friend on a war-path. Darby was shocked and for the first time wondered if many years spent with his own people could eradicate traits and tendencies acquired in a youth spent in *tipis*.

At the end of twenty-four hours the wagon was loaded with fresh meat only and the three were riding to town again. Fevernager was quick to comment on the increased population. Not only were the streets more congested but every eating-house and place of amusement was well filled. They peddled their meat at the eating-houses and found the proprietors were willing to pay a few cents more a pound. The plainsman and Baltimore accepted this unexpected profit without a thought for the cause. Darby, however, was more curious and talked with a waiter at the Dodge House.

The young man told him, "Wagons sent to bring in the men from Camp Carlin. Pay day. Money burns in their pockets. They have a free ride to town. Also from Russell . . . They will walk back."

"They must leave a lot of money here," mused Darby.

"Thousands. Most of them will be busted flat after a night here. I'm getting seventy-five dollars a month as a waiter, and from one dollar up from almost every customer I wait on. Pretty soon I'm going to quit this job and open a place of my own. I'll buy my meats of you."

Darby hunted up his friends at the stage corral, and with their business finished the three dropped in at a new place, eating-house, bar and gambling-hall combined. Fevernager was keen for whisky and disposed of several glasses while waiting for his supper. Baltimore drank nothing. He nudged Darby and remarked:

"Medicine man from the East is drunk."

Darby swung about and beheld the towering figure of Gorl just inside the entrance. His broad face was flushed. "Damn him for a big fool!" muttered the Southerner. "If he gets into another fix he can get himself out."

Gorl's wandering glance picked them up, and he ploughed his way to their table and dropped into a chair. Darby shortly asked, "How's business?"

"Got several hens on. Going to hatch out some big eggs soon. Let's have a drink."

"You're your own boss. I'm not drinking just now. Elder Keen will get you again."

Gorl laughed loudly and boasted, "Bah! That man? Why, he's eating out of my hand."

"Then you'll lose your hand. So he's back in town?"

"Umbrella and all. Came in same time I did, but on a different line. Compromised his claim for a thousand. I told him my mind was blank, but that I knew he wouldn't lend five dollars to his own father. That I was giving him a thousand just to punish myself for going too far."

"I'm glad you're keeping within bounds," coldly remarked Darby.

"Don't preach, old friend. You know I can't answer back no matter what you say. You did me a good turn. Hit me all you like."

"I don't want to hit you, Gorl. But the way you act makes me feel ugly. Where's the little Spanish girl?"

Gorl's face clouded. "Little fool's reformed. What do you know about that? Living with some Irish people. Man sat in the room with a damn big sledge-hammer when I called to have a talk."

"She's very young. Life should have something left for her if she wants to go straight. I don't see why you should call her what you did," growled Darby.

"But that ain't the worst," grumbled Gorl. Darby waited, wondering. Gorl pursed his thick lips and lowering his voice that the others might not overhear he hoarsely whispered, "The big Irishman seems to think I'm going to marry the girl."

Darby stared at him wrathfully and reminded, "Gorl, you're no plum even for a dance-hall girl to pick."

Instead of showing resentment Gorl nodded ruefully and recklessly said, "You're right! Marry in your own class." His mood suddenly changed and he burst into ironic laughter and exclaimed, "What would they say back East! That I'd found my level, I guess. Well, old preacher, I'm going in to fight the tiger. Faro at night and politics daytimes keep me busy."

"Interested in politics?"

"As a representative citizen. Yes. Financial sacrifice to take an office, but office gives a man a certain standing."

Darby smiled sarcastically and reminded, "Rather late to get interested in any office, Gorl. Casement goes to Congress. Whitehead goes to the legislature. And your record would be against you even if there was any vacancy."

"Oh, hell! More sermons in Cheyenne," testily exploded Gorl. "This town is no Sunday-school. Gambling and dance halls are allowed. Then it's expected they'll be patronized. I've done as others do and nothing more. I've accepted the customs and conventions of the place. You forget I have friends and a strong following. I'm thinking of sheriff, or county treasurer."

"Candidates picked for both jobs while you were getting over your drunk in the hills."

Gorl rose and sullenly said, "This is a poor talk for your friends."

"Lawdy! But we love it!" eagerly assured the plainsman.

"Your medicine is weak," remarked Baltimore.

Gorl was frankly angry. He warned, "You'll need strong medicine, young man, once certain people learn you're in Cheyenne. This town hasn't forgotten the gold you scattered around. If you won't tell where you found it I'd advise you to go back and live among Injuns."

As he swung away Darby seriously told his friends, "You shouldn't chip in like that. I can say things to Gorl you shouldn't say. He feels he's under obligations to me. And he has likeable qualities."

"He'll hear ghosts talking about him if he doesn't walk in a new path," calmly insisted Baltimore.

THEY finished their supper and, at Fevernager's insistence, passed into the gambling-hall. Gorl was at the faro table, his coat off, his burly shoulders rounded more than ever as he leaned forward to place heavy bets. Thin and erect, wearing his tall stovepipe and holding his umbrella between his knees, sat Elder Keen. Behind Keen stood Whisky Frank and Jack Hays. As the three hunters watched, Frank procured a glass of liquor and obsequiously placed it before Keen.

Fevernager sniffed in disgust and muttered, "Reg'lar dog-robber! How many stripes has the Easterner stole from the tiger?"

Darby glanced at Gorl's stack of chips

and answered, "He must be playing ahead of the game. He wins again. Now he's doubling his bet."

The three friends were much pleased, however, to see the stack before Elder Keen rapidly melt. Keen's face was drawn in malevolent lines and his gaze was menacing as he stared at the dealer's hands. The latter knew the Elder's history and was ostentatiously open and deliberate as he dealt. For half an hour the three hunters watched the two players, Gorl winning while Keen was losing. At last, with only fifty dollars left, Keen rose and told Gorl:

"If you'd had your nerve to go along with your luck you'd busted the bank before this time instead of winning trifling sums."

Without turning his head Gorl answered, "I've got back the thousand I paid you." He continued betting cautiously and for a minute Keen stood and stared at the back of his big head. Then he wheeled and started toward the short bar with Hays and Whisky Frank falling in behind him.

As Hays neared the bar he collided with Big Mike Dolin. "Damn you! Keep your clumsy feet off my boots!" he growled; and he halted to stare evilly up into the battered face.

"Ye spake thim words to me, ye dirty scut?" rumbled Dolin's deep voice, and regardless of the two guns in Hays' belt he lifted his right hand, which clutched the maul close to the head.

Nonplussed, Hays stared at the maul. He knew his head would be crushed like an egg shell before he could draw a gun. He was doubly infuriated because he believed the railroad man had secured this advantage through ignorance of the man he was facing. It was humiliating. Yet he was not the first badman to be bested by a greenhorn who didn't know the terrible reputation of his adversary. Hays was used to seeing a victim overwhelmed with fear before a hostile move was made. The desperado believed it vital that he redeem himself and secure a few seconds' leeway.

"It's Jack Hays speaking," he grimly told Dolin.

To his chagrin the Irishman was not impressed. "Hay, or straw, it's all the same to me," promptly replied Dolin.

Hays was compelled to glance about for assistance. Elder Keen, standing at the bar and behind Dolin, slid his hand inside the faded umbrella. But it was Whisky Frank, standing on the Irishman's left, who first moved to extricate Hays from his predicament. The room was quiet and all eyes were held on the two men standing so close together and staring into each other's eyes as Frank drew a knife. Gorl was quick to notice the move and he yelled:

"Look out for the knife, Dolin!"

Barely had he shouted the warning before Frank took a step forward and started to shove the blade between the big man's ribs. A forty-four Colt boomed loudly, shattering the tense quiet of the room. Young Baltimore was blowing the smoke from the long barrel of his gun before Whisky Frank's body crumpled to the floor. For a count of three no one moved or spoke. Then came a crescendo of frightened yells and curses and a mad scramble to get out of the room.

Darby whirled Baltimore about and commanded, "For your life! At the camp!"

Dolin blocked Elder Keen's range as he stepped back and stared blankly at the dead man on the floor. With an animal scream Hays jerked out a gun but the heavy barrel of Fevernager's gun landed on his head and sent him senseless to the floor. Elder Keen had shifted his position, moving with the quickness of a cat, and had his revolver clear of the umbrella and was raising it to send a bullet through Baltimore's back. With weapon raised he became a statue. Darby's gun was covering him. He slowly lowered his weapon and thrust it inside the umbrella. On the floor before him was one of his followers dead and another unconscious. Without a word he spun about and hastened to the door at the end of the bar. Baltimore had vanished by this time.

Those remaining in the room pressed forward toward the bar now that the shooting was over. Charlie Martin, destined to be the central figure in the first hanging in Cheyenne, and an excellent example of how one of a respectable family can become a desperado through evil associations, pointed at Darby and cried:

"String him up! He killed that man! I saw him!"

"You're a liar, Martin," Gorl corrected

as he stepped to Darby's side. "This man's gun is fully loaded." Plucking Darby's gun from his hand he spun the cylinder so the men nearest him could see no chamber was discharged."

"That gun ain't been fired," conceded a citizen.

Returning the weapon Gorl seized the dazed Dolin by the shoulders and whirled him about, and warned, "Get out! Go home. Stay indoors to-night."

"Yes, you're mistook, Martin," bawled another spectator. "Feller who did the shooting looks like an Injun. Wears buckskin like the old cuss there."

Elder Keen reappeared in the doorway long enough to announce, "The murderer is called Baltimore, the man who knows where gold can be found and who won't tell." Then he vanished.

Martin retreated. Gorl advised Darby, "Better leave pronto. Too many bad ones here."

"What about you? Martin will be mad."

"Oh,—! Lucky Gorl has the run of the dives. And he won at faro to-night. Don't worry." To the excited men milling about he roared, "Whisky Frank was trying to murder an unarmed man. Serves him right that he's dead. Step up here and see the knife still in his hand."

The bartender emerged from hiding and rolled Frank's body over and plucked the knife from the dead hand and announced, "Here's his sticker. He's deader'n hell. T'other one's waking up."

"String him up before he comes to! Then he'll wake up as dead as his friend!" advised a man from the back of the crowd. But the decent element was not yet organized and for the moment it was enough to know that one of the outcasts was eliminated.

Several of Hays' friends came forward and caught up the limp form and hurried it away. Gorl returned to the faro table and seated himself and waited for the dealer to continue the game. Darby linked an arm through Fevernager's and led the way to the front door. The old plainsman wanted to remain, and he loudly insisted he would "climb" and severely "maul" whoever spoke ill of his young friend and partner. Finding Darby's arm all compelling he satisfied himself with several war-whoops in the Teton Dakota and Shoshone.

THE street in front of the eating-house was crowded, and angry voices were demanding an end be made of indiscriminate killings. Darby and the plainsman waited to see if any effort were made to clean out the place. Lack of leadership, and the hurried scattering of the ne'er-do-wells, discouraged radical action, and the crowd disintegrated. Fevernager apprehended a shot from ambush, but Keen and his like had disappeared for the night. Men were now passing into the gambling-hall to play and drink without knowing they were within a few feet of the scene of a killing.

After they returned to the corral and had harnessed their horses to the wagon, and had been informed of Baltimore's arrival and departure, Darby said, "Gorl did well. Some hot head might have done for me if he hadn't acted and spoken as quickly as he did. He's evened the score between us."

"Ain't fair to me. Ain't just to me. Nothing right about it," angrily insisted the plainsman. "Wa'n't I there, with a barker ready? Who could git the drop on ye? . . . Still the big feller showed more guts'n I ever 'spected he had. And ain't that young Baltimore a hellion?"

The plainsman was disgruntled. His night's programme was spoiled almost before it had opened. He cooled off when he began to fear for Baltimore's safety. Darby did not believe the honest citizens would feel any inclination to avenge the death of an utter scoundrel. As they drove along he insisted:

"By morning they'll be thanking him. There were plenty of honest men in that place to-night, but none was sure of his neighbor. The roughs know each other and had the advantage. Now decent citizens are looking about and getting acquainted they'll go into action and clean house."

"I ain't thinking of that," impatiently explained Fevernager. "I'm thinking how them skunks will hound him and jump him. That tall, thin pizen Keen will pot the boy first whack he gits. I done wrong in not dropping Keen in his tracks. Two men he's got to do for if he holds Hays and t'others at his heels, you'n Baltimore. It won't be safe for Baltimore to show his head in Cheyenne again till them varmints are wiped out."

"Then why bother with Cheyenne?" asked Darby. "Let's go after gold."

"Too late in the season. Next year, mebbe; if Baltimore lives through the winter. Railroad's raising hell with our quiet lives . . . But that Gorl played up well. I'm wondering what the gang will do to him. Reckon he's in more danger'n any of us."

Darby insisted the Easterner would not be harmed so long as he continued carousing with the criminal element and was believed to have considerable money. "His bank account, or what they think he has in the banks, is his safeguard," Darby explained.

They made camp after midnight and found Baltimore sitting some distance from the fire, with a rifle across his lap. "Kola," he called out in a clear voice. "I have had a dream."

"Of hawks?" anxiously inquired Fevernager. "Don't say you dreamed of snakes or the moon."

"My dream was very big. I have dreamed of the Nine Riders, each on a pony of a different color, coming out of a cloud in the west, and as many riders coming out of the north sky on white ponies."

Fevernager clutched Darby's arm and impressively whispered, "This is a big dream. It means a heap. He's dreamed of the Thunder-Birds."

The Southerner, not understanding that to dream of Thunder-Birds was the greatest honor a man could receive from the supernatural powers, held his tongue and wondered how white men could be so simple. Baltimore continued:

"After this I will wear a swallow medicine so my horse will be swift."

"You'd be a plum idiot if you didn't," hoarsely endorsed Fevernager. "It's the swallers that come before thunderstorms, showing the Thunder-Birds think a heap of 'em. It's the best hoss medicine there is if a man's lucky enough to dream of the Thunderers. What else did you see, boy?"

Baltimore stared up at the sky for a minute, then slowly replied, "A rider of a white pony told me a man was to be killed."

"May the Big Muddy turn into a sand ridge if that ain't in keeping with what I was telling Darby!" exclaimed the plainsman. "I said 'twas them or you. I never figgered that by potting one you'd be through with 'em. Prob'ly means Elder Keen, him being the most pizen."

Baltimore shook his head and replied, "I don't think so. The rider said the man would be painted red and standing in water when I killed him."

Fevernager removed his hat and scratched his head in perplexity. "I'd sworn it meant Keen," he mumbled. "Mebbe 'painted red' means he's red in a dream along of the bloody deaths he's brought about."

Baltimore had not thought of that. It did not satisfy him, as a dream of the Thunderers should be concerned with someone of more importance than one of the many frontier desperadoes. "I don't think it means Keen. There's many like him."

By this time Darby was ready to condemn what he believed to be utter nonsense. "Good land! Do you mean to say you take stock in dreams?" he harshly cried.

Baltimore came to his feet and walked away in the starlight toward the low hills. The old plainsman bitterly upbraided, "Now you've done it! You've made a bad talk against a powerful medicine. The younker ain't up to killing you, and that's about all he could do to make sure the Thunderers don't turn ag'in him. Not believe in dreams? What be you talking about? I knew a *keyoka* man who dreamed he had turned the Thunderers ag'in him and was killed by lightning. He told his friends ahead the very day he must die. On that day he rode out from the village on his pony and pointed the stem of his medicine-pipe to the clouds, and a streak of fire come down and killed him most bodaciously."

"I'm sorry if I hurt the boy's feelings," said Darby. "I'm sure the Thunderers will understand he isn't responsible for any foolish thing I may say. You run after him and tell him I'm sorry. Of course I shouldn't make fun of dreams. But the war has hardened me and I've forgotten many of the kindly things I was taught as a boy."

FEVERNAGER refused to follow his friend. Instead he returned to the fire and dropped on the ground and under his breath muttered an Omaha ghost-song, "Night is moving toward us here." He did not interpret it, and had he done so Darby would have had no suspicion that "night" referred to death and the entrance into the realm of ghosts.

Darby continued to argue, "You've got the wrong idea. Why should the Thunderers, who love your friend, turn against him because a white man said something he shouldn't? If that's the way a red medicine works all I have to do when I want to kill a chief is to learn what his medicine is and laugh at it, and then the medicine kills him. That's nonsense."

Fevernager brooded over this bit of reasoning and finally admitted there was sense in it. However, he insisted, "Your talk has scared my medicine so it won't tell me just who is meant by the man 'painted red.' And that's the man the younker must kill."

"He doesn't have to know ahead," soothed Darby.

"No; I reckon he don't. The Thunderers can make a man see 'way ahead if they take a notion. Prob'ly they reckon they've told him enough by saying the man will be painted red and standing in water. But I'm bodaciously cur'rous to know who the feller is. Some renegade, most likely."

"Why not Jack Hays? Must be a man who's an enemy of Baltimore's. Hays surely is that."

"Never Hays," rejected the plainsman firmly. "Even if it means one of that crowd it couldn't be Hays. Hasn't the boy already seen the red crease of a noose 'round that critter's neck? Elder can't fit in as I've had a strong idee *I'm* the one who'll rub him out. Well, the dream must be for the younker's good if it keeps him out the path of them hellions in Cheyenne. I'm making myself think he won't be blamed for your foolish blatting. If it takes him away I'll know your talk don't 'mount to anything."

"Take him away? I don't understand," puzzled Darby.

"Ain't he got to go into the hills somewhere and find a band of Sioux and go through the *Heyoka kaga?*"

Fearing he would give further offense Darby was very humble in asking what his friend meant. Fevernager patiently explained that a man honored by the Thunder-Birds must endure a period of humilation in public where the Thunderers were accepted as a most powerful supernatural agency. This was the perquisite for help from the Thunderers."

Darby was befuddled in endeavoring to follow this line of reasoning. Incidentally he knew nothing of the red man's deep belief in the occult. He increduously demanded, "You mean to tell me he will leave us and go back to the Indians?"

"Hopping toads!" exclaimed the plainsman in deep irritation. "He's got to, 'ain't he? See any Injuns in this camp he can go to? Ever hear tell of a man going through the *Heyoka kaga* among white folks?"

"Well, damme! Both you and the boy have Indian minds! They murdered his folks and he goes back to them as the result of a dream. He throws up this business of hunting and selling along of a dream. Next thing I know you'll have a dream that'll be sending you racing north to find red company."

"No. My mind ain't red enough for that. I wouldn't fit in the *Heyoka kaga.* The boy has lived with redskins almost from a baby up. Course his mind is streaked with red. He's spent more years in their tipis then he was in wooden houses. He has many friends among 'em. My case is different. Yet I've often wintered with different bands. I've l'arned quite a bit about their medicines. L'arned enough to know the things they believe ain't foolishness. They've lived out here ever since the earth was made. You reckon they've been wrong in all they think since the world was built. Such thoughts belong in a crazy head. Why shouldn't we believe in their medicine if we send folks among 'em to make 'em believe in white church medicine? And what one of the church medicines is right? Different churches tell different things. Don't Injuns live up to their beliefs closer'n whites live up to theirs?"

"I'm not trying to argue. Just trying to understand. And my head is very thick," placated Darby.

"You're all right," slowly endorsed Fevernager. "Only trouble is you try do all your thinking in one spot in your head. You try to think about red things with a white mind.... Well, it's for us to run the camp and sell meat and hides, and keep a share for the boy. He'll be back sometime."

"You talk as if he were already on his

way," remonstrated Darby. "He hasn't said he's going. He hasn't said good-by yet."

"He said good-by when he told his dream. As near as a redskin ever says it. He was waiting for us to come before he went away. Now he's spoken he is on his way."

The sound of a horse galloping caused Darby to throw up his head and look toward the hills. He expected to see a rider come racing down the moonlight on the long slope.

"He's pulling out now," murmured Fevernager without shifting his gaze from the fire. "We shall not see him. He has gone to his dream."

But they heard his strong voice singing, growing fainter as the horse raced away. Fevernager moodily repeated, "*malipiya ogtanasin ta itokabya*," and translated, 'Before the gathering of the clouds[*]'. The boy's made a *heyoka* song." As the sound of the galloping horse ceased the plainsman threw up his head and cried, "Good luck and good hunting to him."

DARBY slept poorly that night and dreamed of Baltimore as a red man. When he opened his eyes early in the morning he found himself alone and he feared the plainsman also had deserted him. Then he saw him approaching from the broken country. He was afoot and walking with head bowed. On gaining the camp he raked open a bed of coals and set about cooking breakfast. Darby washed at the creek and prepared the coffee. He asked no questions and the old man continued silent. They talked scarcely any as they ate their breakfast.

As soon as the meal was finished Fevernager directed, "Hitch up and follow the trail back into the hills. I'll ride ahead and see what I can shoot. We'll take only what two of us can handle. We won't make any buckskin. The younker was a prime one at that."

Darby did as bid and walked his team up the slope. By the time he was in the broken country he could hear the cracking of his companion's rifle. He halted the team at the foot of a low ridge and carrying his carbine cautiously gained the crest. Before him was a large grassy bowl and a herd of antelope was gracefully drifting toward him. Dots in the short grass behind them told of the plainsman's marksmanship. The herd halted at the foot of Darby's slope and he removed a red handkerchief from his neck and elevated his arm and waved it slowly back and forth. The foremost of the herd was quick to see the patch of red, and in single file the curious creatures began drawing closer to learn what it all meant.

Darby ceased signaling and began working the Henry repeater and shot four before the rest took alarm. As the herd wheeled in flight Fevernager rose from cover and waved his hat for the wagon. Darby secured the team and crossed the ridge and proceeded to help in dressing out six carcasses. His own kill was picked up on the way back to camp.

The plainsman criticised, "If you'd Injuned your work a trifle we could bagged about all of them. These'll have to do."

"I always feel cheap when I shoot an antelope," confessed Darby. "No wonder the Indians hate us when we kill so much game with magazine guns."

"We ain't killed anything we can't use," replied the plainsman. "We ain't fooled these critters by bringing 'em up by hand and making 'em trust us, and depend on us for food, same's you do in the East with cows. *That* would make me feel cheap. Pet a cow and have her trust you and wind up by butchering her. I only wish we was after buffler. Speaking of buffler, son, did you know the quickest way to cooper the Injun is to wipe out the buffler. You can't drive 'em onto reservation by trying to kill off their ponies. You've got to kill off the buffler if you want to send 'em to reservations so white folks can dig gold in their country."

"Seems hard, almost any way you look at it," mused Darby.

"Of course I like the old ways and the old days best," continued Fevernager sadly. "But you railroad builders and town builders and storekeepers and gold hunters will always fight Injun so long as the Injun has the buffler to live on."

"I understand how you feel," moodily said Darby. "I'm not sentimental. The war killed most of that out of me mighty quick. But there's something sad in changing conditions that always have existed."

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[*] This song was sung by Lone Man, a Teton, in honor of his Swallow Medicine. Lone Man took part in two Sun dances and had a hundred scars on each arm. He was among the warriors who killed Custer and his men.

"Son, it makes me feel blue most the time. I've got just one thing to be thankful for. I was born early enough and come out here early enough to have the old ways almost last out my years. I wouldn't give a cuss to be young to-day and have to live my life in sound of hooting enjines and under wood roofs, and all that. What ends the free life of the Injun ends the free life for my kind."

Both were missing young Baltimore. Both were wondering just whither he had gone. They worked much in silence, skinning the carcasses and separating the meat with their fingers for the pickling barrels. Darby took the cart and brought back several loads of fuel from the nearest patch of timber. With the meat in the brine work was commenced on drying the hides, the part of their work the Southerner disliked the most.

That night after supper Fevernager saw much of his past life in the fire. He commenced talking to himself, speaking aloud. He beheld old Bill Williams, Dick Wooten, Tom Tobin, the great Carson, and other mountain men, most of whom had gone over the Last Divide. He greeted these and talked laconically. He saw old red friends and enemies and unconsciously conversed in the sign language. When he lasped into silence Darby did not disturb him. After a bit he sang old songs he had learned when a young man, songs of the Chippewa and Dakota and the Omaha and other tribes. There was a wistful note in Fevernager's voice. He was living again in the past.

Suddenly he lifted his head and blinked at Darby for a moment and announced, "I was with Ashley in Twenty-three, when he was licked by the 'Rickarees and lost a keel and ten thousand dollar load of trade goods. I was with him next year when he went to the Green River valley. How I laughed when I helped take the first batch of Oregon people through, and they had a jollification in South Pass 'cause they believed they was most at the end of the journey. How glum they looked when they was told they was only half the distance from the Big Muddy and where they was going to. Well, I don't laugh any more when I enter the Pass. No more. Telegraph station there now.

"Lawd! To think how times have changed! Never could a made me believe when I was your age that white folks would scatter out here so thick as to spile the country. Well, let's sleep. That's the only thing that don't change. Sleep. A strong medicine, son. Sleep, and old friends and old times are 'round you. Buffler streaming north and covering everything you see. Bufflers drowned by breaking through rotten ice and drifting down the rivers each spring by thousands. Sleep. I reckon death will be a sleep where you dream over old times. It's a good medicine. Let's turn in. I feel, I'm going to rendezvous with Bill Williams an' t'others, now dead and dreaming."

In the chapters to come the badmen of Cheyenne increase in power and arrogance, and honest men draw together for the inevitable conflict.

Three MILES UP

A Breathless Story of the Air

By RAOUL F. WHITFIELD

CHARLIE BRENT flipped a pair of aces across the table and scooped in a handful of chips. Duke Connors swore softly, and grabbed Charlie's wrist. He laid down three queens. I grunted. My three kings looked like royal winners—for about two seconds. Then Charlie chuckled and flipped down a third ace and the joker, which we were playing wild. Duke and I groaned, and Charlie pulled the chips in toward him.

"You know the old one," he reminded, "about the two traveling—"

That was as far as Charlie got. The room was suddenly filled with it—filled with the *boom* of that air crash. There isn't any sound like it—wing fabric, taut and doped, suddenly smashed, ripped. Flying wires released, struts snapped. Everything at high tension, high speed—and then stopped. It's a fearful *boom*—the crash sound.

For several seconds we sat rigid. There wasn't any use of jumping up, running out. We knew that. Al Byrle broke the silence.

"Who's up?" he snapped.

I tried to think. It seemed to me that Bert Mallin was doing an instrument test on a D. H. Caraway had said something about seeing how a new Douglass acted around her ceiling.

"Who's down, you mean," Charlie corrected grimly. "Come on!"

He was out of our little den of iniquity in a flash, and the rest of us weren't far behind him. I don't think any of us figured we could do any good. But Charlie got us into motion. We piled out through the narrow door, stared at the level Field stretch. Ground-crew men were running toward the north end; the crash-wagon was streaking out that direction. A cloud of white dust hung over the ground; suddenly a black finger of smoke wavered above it. Red showed as the flames streaked up.

Charlie Brent swore softly. I looked up into the sky, hoping to see a 'chute drifting down, with that wrecked ship's pilot dangling in the harness. But there was no sign of a 'chute. The flyer hadn't got clear. And that meant just one thing. There was no chance of Doc Collins having any work to do with that bird.

I lighted a pill. My fingers were shaking a bit, but not as much as they used to shake a year or so ago. Take it or leave it—that's the only way to stick in the test-pilot game. You get hard. Actually, I was thinking about Johnny Cole. He owed me fifty bucks. And Harry Reese had borrowed my second-best helmet the night before.

A voice sounded behind me. "That was Benham, Mac—riding the new Beronie two-seater. Spun down out of the clouds."

I swore softly. It seemed to make things different, when you knew who was down. Benham, I'd never liked him much. He had a quiet, grim way of smiling that I didn't like. And he'd never been a mixer. But it was tough, of course.

Sitting down not too close to the nearest dead-line ship, I smoked my pill. Charlie Brent came over and sat beside me. The Field siren had been wailing; it stopped suddenly. But the wind brought back the hiss of water on the hot exhaust pipes of the burning plane. The Beronie, I remembered, was not air-cooled.

"Funny!" Charlie muttered. "Came down out of the clouds—they must be hanging around four thousand. How about his 'chute?"

I didn't say anything. There were three ships in the air. One of them zoomed into the clouds as I stared up. Off to the west was another, a small plane. And down low, coming into the Field, was a big bombing-type plane.

Why hadn't Benham used his 'chute? That was a pretty fair question, but not the sort of one that's easy to answer. He might have lost his nerve, he might not have had the kind of nerve it takes to go over the side. Or the 'chute might not have been a possibility—with the Beronie in a tight spin. There were a few things we didn't know—not yet.

THE wrecked ship wasn't burning now. And the ambulance was coming in from the plane, coming fast, too. I got a glimpse of the super's car cutting out from the big administration building. H. B. was going out to look things over, and the superintendent looked with keen eyes. Herbert Brooks knew his stuff, from prop to tail-assembly. It took a man who did know his stuff, to run the largest test-field in the country.

Charlie Brent was frowning. He bummed a light from the tip of my pill.

"Beronie's going to take it hard," he stated. "I read some of the reports on that two-seater of his. They were pretty sweet. She looked like a good bus to me."

"I handled one of 'em a week ago. Stream-line test." I dropped my butt and heeled it. "She acted like a million, though I didn't stunt her."

Charlie's eyes were on the ambulance as it angled across toward the emergency hospital. He shook his head slowly.

"Benham's been over the side a couple of times," he said slowly, shooting one of my theories all to pieces. "He wasn't yellow—not *that* way."

I caught the emphasis, and looked up. There was a peculiar expression in Charlie's eyes; his tone had been grim. I started to ask the question, and checked myself.

"Maybe we'll learn something from the wreck—and what's left of Benham," I said slowly. "Maybe we're just shooting in the dark. Funny things happen up above, you know."

Charlie shrugged his shoulders. The super's car had reached the wreck. I watched the big bomber landed in perfect style. Harry Reese was flying her, I guessed. He was on big jobs, and he worked them with some real skill. Almost three thousand air-hours, combined with his natural ability, made him one of the finest pilots at Rook. It wasn't so bad when he borrowed a helmet of mine. I was reasonably certain of getting it back.

"Ten to one he thought he could pull her out of that spin and it didn't take," Charlie muttered. "Spun him unconscious, most likely. He may have had her all the way up—and that girlie has some ceiling. But it's funny. He'd been over the side—"

"You never can tell," I said grimly. "Maybe H. B. will have something to tell us. What did you mean, a few minutes ago, about his not being yellow 'that' way?"

Charlie's eyes were narrowed. He shook his head.

"Nothing doing," he said quietly. "I don't hold four aces so I'm not laying the cards down. Not this time."

SUPERINTENDENT Herbert Brooks sat behind his desk and looked the four of us over. There were Harry Reese, Lieutenant Price, Charlie Brent and myself. We sat across the desk from Brooks, and waited for him to shoot the works. It didn't take him long to get started. There's grey in H. B's hair; he's tall and lean. Straight features, with a rather thin, browned face. He spoke in his usual clipped sentences.

"Guess you fellows figured it funny Benham didn't use his 'chute. He's hopped over before. Figured it queer myself. Nothing funny about it. Fourteen bullet holes in the Beronie's fuselage and wings. Three in Benham's body. Sky-murder doesn't let a man use a 'chute—that's elemental. Any questions?"

Any questions? We're used to getting surprises, around a flying field. But that little speech of H. B's had pulled us all stiff in our seats. We sat staring at Brooks, and Charlie was the first to come out of it.

"What kind of—"

"Regulation Browning non-explosive bullets," the super cut in. "Two in the chest, one in the head. Doc says he was dead before the ship got into the spin."

Lieutenant Price swore softly. His eyes met mine.

"Got him, above the clouds, with machine-gun fire!" he muttered. "Now, why in hell—"

"That's it," Brooks interrupted again. "You four men are the most experienced at the Field. As soon as Doc and myself got a look at what was left of the wing surfaces we decided on working quietly. The ground-crew men didn't see anything. Got the wreckage in Z hanger, under guard. Newspapers get the usual thing—ship came down in a spin."

I frowned. "Tough on Beronie," I stated. "Makes it look like a structural weakness. It's bound to hurt—"

Brooks grunted. "I've got a fifty-page report on Benham," he cut in. "His record's perfect. Intelligence tells me there's no reason—"

H. B. stopped. He grinned sort of foolishly. But Charlie and myself were grinning, too. We'd been wise to the fact, for a good many months, that Intelligence knew a lot about Rook Field pilots. They had to—the air game was getting big.

"Personal murder is out," Brooks said slowly. "As a motive, no good. Here we are: the Beronie's a good ship, she's rated high in almost two months of test-work. In her class there isn't a plane a close second. Guess we all know that. All right. She's *too* good—for some one. Pilot doesn't matter. Might have been you, Mac. Only I never sent you up for a ceiling test. That was Benham's assignment. Three ships in the air. Clouds at four thousand, clear air, then another layer at about twelve. Reese had the bomber up under them. Didn't go through. No Field ship above that second layer except Benham in the Beronie. Benham and—"

The super broke off, spread his hands. His face was grim.

"—the pilot who shot him down," he stated slowly. "Well, you've got it all, all that I know. What's the answer?"

There was a little silence. Lieutenant Price was looking at Brooks. Charlie's eyes met mine. Harry Reese was shaking his head slowly, his eyes narrowed. Brooks spoke in a grim tone.

"Here's the answer—we let it go as an accident. But we get this sky-killer! No talk. Intelligence'll take care of Beronie—I've had a long talk with him. He's taking a trip away from the field. He knows a lot, has a lot of ideas not yet blueprinted. Mac, you'll go on the Beronie job. They're doping the wings on the second ship now. She's a sister plane. Instrument board's changed, that's all. Lieutenant Price, you'll run tests on the DeHaviland. Prop synchronization with two Browning guns. Harry Reese, he'll keep flying that Douglass bomber. Brent, you take the single-seater Bergman. Following me, you men?"

Following him? We were ahead of him, I guessed. Already I was figuring tactics. It reminded me of Bourgeville days. A slanted squadron field. Rain. Bum air. Boche bombs for early breakfast.

"We'll stay out of the air for three days," H. B. was saying. "We'll give out a little publicity—we still have confidence in the Beronie—and such stuff. Further and more intensive tests are planned. Then we'll get going, with Mac handling the two-seater. How's this sound? We'll get low clouds and a grey day—"

Brooks lowered his voice. His sentences shortened; there was a grim smile in his grey eyes, a knife-edge tone to his voice. He had us leaning forward, listening. The drone of a ship, high in the sky, came into the room. H. B. talked for about three minutes. He could cram in a lot of words in that time, a lot of facts, orders. Then he finished.

"Well?" he demanded. "How does it

sound to you fellows? Will it work?"

Charlie Brent looked at me. It was Charlie who spoke first.

"I've got a hunch," he said slowly, "that if it doesn't work Mac and the Beronie sure will eat lead!"

H. B. frowned. His eyes met mine. He spoke without hesitation.

"It's a volunteer job," he said quietly. "I'm not ordering any of you to tackle it—"

"Be yourself!" I interrupted, and Brooks just grinned. Being an old-timer, there are points in my favor. I can talk up—once in a while.

"Let's hope," Charlie said grimly, "this lead-sprayer will be himself."

And after that we commenced to work out the details. When a ship comes down out of the clouds with its fabric and its pilot filled with lead—the details count.

ROOK'S a big field. There are civilian and officer test-pilots, civilian and Army designers of ships and engines. A couple of thousand humans engaged in the business of conquering the air. It's a grim business. It takes money, big money, and it makes money. That's where Intelligence comes in. Publicity—no. The public never hears about intrigue at Rook. The public reads the good news. When a test-pilot goes west the press gets the story—but that isn't so important. The inside stuff stays inside. It's part of the game.

There had been the usual run of field rumors, after Benham's crash It was said that he had lost his nerve, that he had failed to get out on a wing. There was a rumor spread about that his heart had gone back on him. H. B. encouraged the latter rumor. The four of us who had been in Brooks' office, a week ago, seemed to favor such an attempt at explanation.

It had rained for two days after the crash. Then had come two bright days. No clouds. The field, the men connected with it, were naturally interested in the Beronie. There was a rumor that the designer had gone mad. As a matter of fact, Beronie had gone to Washington, under a fairly heavy guard.

The fifth day after the crash, getting to the field a bit late from town—there are no sleeping quarters for test-pilots at Rook—I discovered that the news was out. The sister ship of the plane that had come down in a spin—the second Beronie—was out of the hangar, on the dead-line. Mechanics were working on her. I headed for the administration building. There were heavy grey clouds at about four thousand, and a rather stiff wind from the north. Few ships were in the sky.

I got into Brooks' office, and found Lieutenant Price and Charlie Brent already there. H. B. smiled at me.

"Reese is up with the bomber," he stated. "Want to have it so it looks as though I'm not sending you all up together. He's got gas for three hours, and he's at seven thousand, over Green Lake. That's clear air. Lieutenant Free was up thirty minutes ago, and gave me a good report of conditions. The second strata of cloud is hanging around nine thousand and there's a stiff blow up there. It's all clear at eleven thousand. I've posted a notice to the effect that Charlie and Lieutenant Price are flying to Lysle Field. They'll get off in that direction and fly low. Give them twenty minutes—then go up. Get in the clear air, and play around. Watch yourself—be sure of the pack—'chute. Feel fit enough?"

I nodded. The super smiled as cheerfully as was possible.

"Intelligence has learned a few things in the last four days. But not enough to keep you from being bait. It may be we're all wrong, nothing may happen today. In that case—" he hesitated, then went on—"we'll try again. We've been very careful, no reason for any one to suspect anything but a test flight of the Beronie. Well, you'd better go out and rev her up, Mac."

I nodded. "In view of the fact that I'm taking something of a chance," I stated dryly, "you might tell me the 'few things' that Intelligence has learned."

Brooks frowned. Then, suddenly, he nodded his head.

"Beronie has a few enemies," he stated slowly. "He worked in Austria for a time but didn't get enough support. He has claimed, several times in the past few years, that they stole some of his stuff. Not the government but private interests. They made him an offer six months ago, wanted him to come back. He turned it down, wouldn't go. We were interested in his ship at the time. Intelligence has one rather threatening letter, written from across the water. He turned it over to them."

I shook my head. "Can't picture a ship flying over and shooting down a plane that way," I muttered. "It has to take off and it has to land."

Brooks had a peculiar expression in his eyes. His voice was hard.

"Bullet holes are bullet holes—and you've seen the lead Doc Collins—"

I nodded. There was no doubt about that, I'd seen it. And the bullet holes in the fabric, too.

"Let's get going," Charlie suggested, a touch of nervousness in his voice. "The clouds may break."

I turned toward the door. Charlie and Lieutenant Price followed. H. B's voice came to me as I went out. Just one word, cheerful enough.

"Luck!"

Behind me, Charlie grunted. His voice was low, steady.

"It'll take more than luck if the super's guessing right," he stated. "How's your stunting mood right now, Mac?"

I forced a grin. "Good," I returned. "But it'll be better when I see a strange ship headed my way."

"If you see one," Charlie came back grimly, and I wasn't quite sure what he meant by that.

THE Beronie climbed into the lower strata of clouds in fine shape. I had her in a mild angle, and as the roar of the curved exhausts increased with the cloud density, and the instrument-board glass misted from the white stuff, I eased off on the climb angle. There had been plenty of talk for the last few days about the Beronie. It was known that she was to go up for a thorough test the first time we got bad air. It was bad today. If Intelligence and Brooks were right, word would be passed out from the inside. Another Beronie coming down in a spin—and the designer would be started on the slide. It isn't easy to come back when your ships are crashing.

I didn't want to come out of the clouds in too steep a climb. If there was a killer laying over those clouds—I wanted to see him first. As H. B. had said, bullet holes were bullet holes. But the thing that got me was why the fellow who had pumped lead into Benham and his plane had thought the lead and the holes wouldn't be discovered. He might have figured on the ship burning, of course. And it had been only luck that Collins had been able to look Benham's body over. Sometimes a plane will smash a man terribly in a three-hundred-foot fall and not so badly in a fifteen-thousand-foot drop.

The clouds were thick—and deep. We came out of them suddenly, and I leveled off and banked around. There wasn't a ship in sight. No sun. Just a grey semi-darkness, with wisps of clouds drifting down from the strata above. The air was very bad. It took two hands on the stick, at intervals. There was a strong down-swirl from the second layer of clouds.

I climbed the Beronie again. She was a sweet ship, and she purred up in a fine engine voice. My wrist watch showed me that Lieutenant Price should be pretty high. Harry was the best air-target man we had at Rook. And he could fly like a fool.

Leveling off beneath the lower wisps of the second cloud strata, I banked around. There was no other ship in sight. The air was too bumpy for comfort and I decided to get up above, to get into the sun-light and have a look around. I pulled back on the stick, and we went up. White fog, misted goggle-glass, increased roar of the engine.

I checked up on my air-sense by watching the level glass. This cloud bank was deeper than the first, thicker and wetter. Everything was soaked; I was wiping my goggle-glass almost continually. And my angle of climb was stiffer than it had been before. There was nasty air in the stuff; I wanted to get out of it, to get where I could see something. I had a hunch, or something close to a hunch, that nothing much would happen. But I wasn't careless about the feeling.

THERE was a break in the clouds; the prop shot light mists away, whirled the ship suddenly into a blinding yellow light. I wiped my goggle-glass clear for the fiftieth time, leveled off. Mechanically I banked the ship, tried to blink through the glare of that sun.

My ears cleared. The plane was flying less than fifty feet above the clouds, which was where I wanted her until I got a look around. Ragged crests of white swept close, a few of them streaked up and engulfed us for split seconds. All was clear to the north—a compass north, of course.

I moved the stick sharply to the left. The Beronie went over on a wing. Cutting the throttle down, I nosed her over to get a glimpse of the upper surfaces of the clouds. Then it happened.

There was a *rat-tat-tat* from above—one sound that pulled me rigid in the seat, almost froze me to the controls. Machine-gun fire!

I zoomed. There was no good of going into those clouds with the other fellow on my tail. That stream of lead would have gotten me before I could have thrown the other ship off. And the zoom saved my neck—at least for a few seconds.

I caught the flash of grey-black wings as the other ship went down into the clouds, and I kept right on zooming until the engine-drone told me we were close to a stall. Then I got out of it and leveled off.

Scared? No doubt about it. Up to that point I hadn't really felt that H. B. had the right idea. I'd had more of a feeling that some pilot at the field had hated—had hated pretty hard. Over by the lake the boys do some shooting, once in a while. The water takes the stray lead. But we were a few miles from the lake. And the lead hadn't been stray, not all of it. I could see light through three holes in the upper surface of my left wing.

I was thinking hard—when the ship came up through the clouds again. It was a sweet piece of camouflage. Wings smeared grey and black, like the clouds. A single-seater, with two guns on the front cowling. The sun flashed on their muzzles, and they glittered.

The Beronie was a ship. I didn't know what this other fellow was sky-riding, but I did know that it would have to climb some to get within machine-gun range of the Beronie. And I climbed.

I'd come out of that second cloud strata at almost eleven thousand feet. There was no oxygen mask and helmet aboard; I hadn't come prepared for altitude. But, unless I was all wrong, neither had this killer. And if I could keep climbing, the chances were he wouldn't get the altitude I could get. One thing was fairly certain, the Beronie could take me higher than I could go and retain consciousness.

I leveled off, banked over and risked a look. The other ship was still coming, but he was climbing in a spiral. Sure of me, of course. Not worried so long as I didn't get below the clouds and in sight of those on the ground.

A thought hit me pretty hard. We'd framed it so that Charlie Brent would cover air to the north; Harry Reese to the south. Lieutenant Price was slated to come right on up and hang around in the clouds near me. That is, within a mile or so. He hadn't come up yet and when he did the killer below would have altitude on him, plenty of it. Price was good—but perhaps this pilot below was good, too. Even he had missed getting me in his first dive—there were holes in the doped wing-surfaces.

At fifteen thousand I leveled off again. The single-seater pilot was taking his time—I'd gained on him in the last three thousand feet. But he was still coming up—the sun still glittered, made bright spots of the gun muzzles. I stared past him, to the south, swore softly. Price was up, too! His plane was climbing, the sun glistening on the cloud-soaked wings!

I nosed up again. My heart was doing a sort of double beat. It looked as though I'd be in on a nice, little air scrap—the first one since the late unpleasantness.

Three miles up! The altimeter registered that much. I watched the instrument-board. I was watching it when the engine gave its first sputter—after that I worked for adjustment of air and gas—and didn't get it.

She wouldn't climb, not with a bad miss. I leveled off. She was spluttering badly through the exhausts. The atmosphere was getting a bit too rare and she was a new plane. I nosed her over, stuck my head over the fuselage.

THE camouflaged plane was too close for comfort and still climbing. Price's ship was coming along, all right, but he wasn't within machine-gun range of this bird who had put holes in my wing surface. I guessed that the killer didn't know Price was coming up, so that was my cue.

Slipping off on a wing, I kicked her sharply into a spin. The Beronie got into it fast. Her flying wires were screaming shrilly as we dropped in a whirl past the grey-black plane. But that pilot was wise. He nosed over, came down in a straight dive, right on my tail.

Then he opened up with those two guns and, as I got the controls in neutral, leveled her off, he got the Beronie! A long burst caught the tail assembly, smashed the control wires, ripped through the fabric. I shoved forward on the stick—and nothing happened. The Beronie just fluttered. She was done, I knew that. Elevator and rudder fin—flapping in the air. Out of control.

The nose started to drop down, the weight of the engine pulling her. I snapped my safety belt, got a leg over the side of the fuselage, a foot on a wing surface. My right hand gripped a V-strut, the left hand fingers fumbled for the rip-cord ring of the seat-pack 'chute.

Above the first hum of the wires sounded the clatter of machine-gun fire. A long burst. I didn't wait to see what was happening. As I slid off the wing, narrowly missing the shattered tail-assembly, I heard another clatter. Price was on the job, I thought grimly, and then tried to hold my breath.

I let myself go down some before I jerked the ring that released the pilot-'chute. The little spread cracked open—jerked out the greater arc of white silk. I was falling face downward when the harness tightened up. There was one sickening, jolting, downward swing—then I was sucking in breaths of air, shaking the tears from my eyes and drifting.

Combat? It was pretty and I had a grand-stand seat. The killer's ship and Price's DeHaviland were a quarter mile below me and off to the south. They were in close to each other and they were fighting. The DeHaviland was slower on the stunt stuff than the single-seater—but Price came over in a loop and I heard his guns clatter as he came down. The single-seater was caught below that dive, she fell off on a wing almost instantly. As Price zoomed up again she was in a tight spin. I let out a hoarse yell, and kicked my legs. I had a flashing glimpse of the Beronie going into the clouds—then I twisted and watched the grey-black ship. She flashed out of sight, scattering wisps of clouds above and Price took his DeHaviland down fairly close.

I drifted, seventeen feet a second was my drop, and said a couple of prayers. One was that the falling ships wouldn't catch any one beneath them. And the other was that a whirling prop on Brent's or Harry Reese's ship wouldn't meet up with me as I drifted through the white stuff.

Shaky? I was pretty near all in, and I've always considered myself a pretty tough guy. But the war's been over a long time, and even test-piloting gets monotonous. I closed my eyes going through the clouds. It wasn't exactly pleasant. But I had a couple of things to be thankful about. The killer had got the Beronie but not me. And Price had got the sky-murderer of Pilot Benham.

I drifted out of the lower bank of clouds, wiped the moisture off my face and stared below. It looked as if I were getting a break. Rook Field was setting a mile to the south and a wind from the north was drifting me in that direction. I wouldn't hit the Field, but I'd come fairly close. And the country wasn't so bad for a drop and drag.

I KICKED around, stared to the north. There were two fires on the ground, both in level fields, about a half mile apart. Over one of the spurts of black smoke the DeHaviland was banking. Several cars were racing out from the Field. Harry Reese's bomber was coming down out of the clouds, from the south. I guessed that he'd been laying low, and coming down once in a while for a look—that was the way H. B. had framed it.

Then I commenced to worry about myself. I was over-shooting the Field, but some of the boys were running out after me. I decided not to try a slip, being no expert at such stuff, and just let her drift. We cleared some low trees by a few feet, slanted down over a road. I drew my legs up like a frog, to break the force of that seventeen-foot-a-second drop, and we hit. Fairly soft ground and considerable low growth. But the trees kept the wind down, and she didn't drag, not much. I was out of the harness and limping around when the first ground-crew men panted up. I even managed a grin.

A flivver rattled along the road. I started toward it.

"Pack up that 'chute," I called back pretty weakly. "I want a peek at what's left of the bird who made me jump."

I dropped down beside the sergeant who was driving the flivver. Tired? There was a sharp reaction. But I was still curious. We were rattling along toward the spot where the black and grey ship had crashed when H. B.'s car came along, headed the other way. Brakes squealed, I piled down.

"Who was he?" I asked grimly, and Brooks motioned me to climb in.

"Ever hear of Eric Grutter?" he asked.

I swore softly. "The bird who hopped off from Laredo with a Border Patrol ship—and went down to Imperial Valley—to that Chinese concession?"

Brooks nodded. His face was grim. He spoke in a low tone.

"The same," he stated. "Intelligence finds that Grutter was after big money, always. The Chinese, who had that cotton concession along the American waterway south-east of Tia Juana, offered him real coin to instruct some of their boys. They had a hunch on their little revolution. Grutter skipped off with a ship and the Chinks double-crossed him. They couldn't get planes, anyway. So Grutter comes back. He crashes and abandons the ship. The Border Patrol and Intelligence are hot after him—but he gets clear. And the next we hear of him—"

We pulled up beside the administration building, and H. B. led the way into his office. He looked at me narrowly.

"Saw you kicking your legs as you came through so figured you were all right," he stated. "You were lucky."

I nodded. H. B. spoke in a steady tone.

"Next we heard of him was when two shots were fired at Beronie—over in town. They were fired from a window, and we had a guard with Beronie who chased the rifle-user until he got clear in a car. He gave us a fair description. Then Benham was shot down."

I nodded. But I was still puzzled.

"Why Beronie—and Beronie's plane?" I asked.

H. B. smiled grimly. "Beronie was making his commercial plane then, manufacturing it when Grutter wanted to buy ships. He came to Beronie and the designer agreed to let him have planes. Then he investigated, found why Grutter wanted them, and turned him down. Grutter was licked. But he went back and tried to play in with the Chinks, with only the stolen ship. It didn't work. He was forced to fly out, hating Beronie just about as hard as he could hate. Then he crashed in a forced landing. He got a nasty wallop in the head. His hatred became an obsession. A week ago Vance Field lost a black and grey painted single-seater. They were using it for gunnery, and it was stolen off the dead-line. They had admitted the public to watch maneuvers above the Field. Intelligence got in touch with us—but Grutter shot down the first Beronie ship before I could figure his game. You know the rest."

I grunted. "Where did he get the information about the Beronie's flight?" I asked.

H. B. chuckled. "He laid for Benham's ship, may have been up several times before Benham came above the clouds. He knew flying weather, of course. And we didn't make any secret over the Beronie's tests. The press had it. But for your flight—" H. B. grinned—"We fed him information, saw that he got it. We've got a man named Vesey under arrest. A crew man here at the field, and an old crony of Grutter's. You see, Grutter wanted to break Beronie. He struck at him through the new plane. Later, he might have tried to get Beronie again. That's why we played so rough. I talked to Lieutenant Price, after he landed near the wreck of the single-seater. He said he was afraid he wouldn't sit in soon enough to save you."

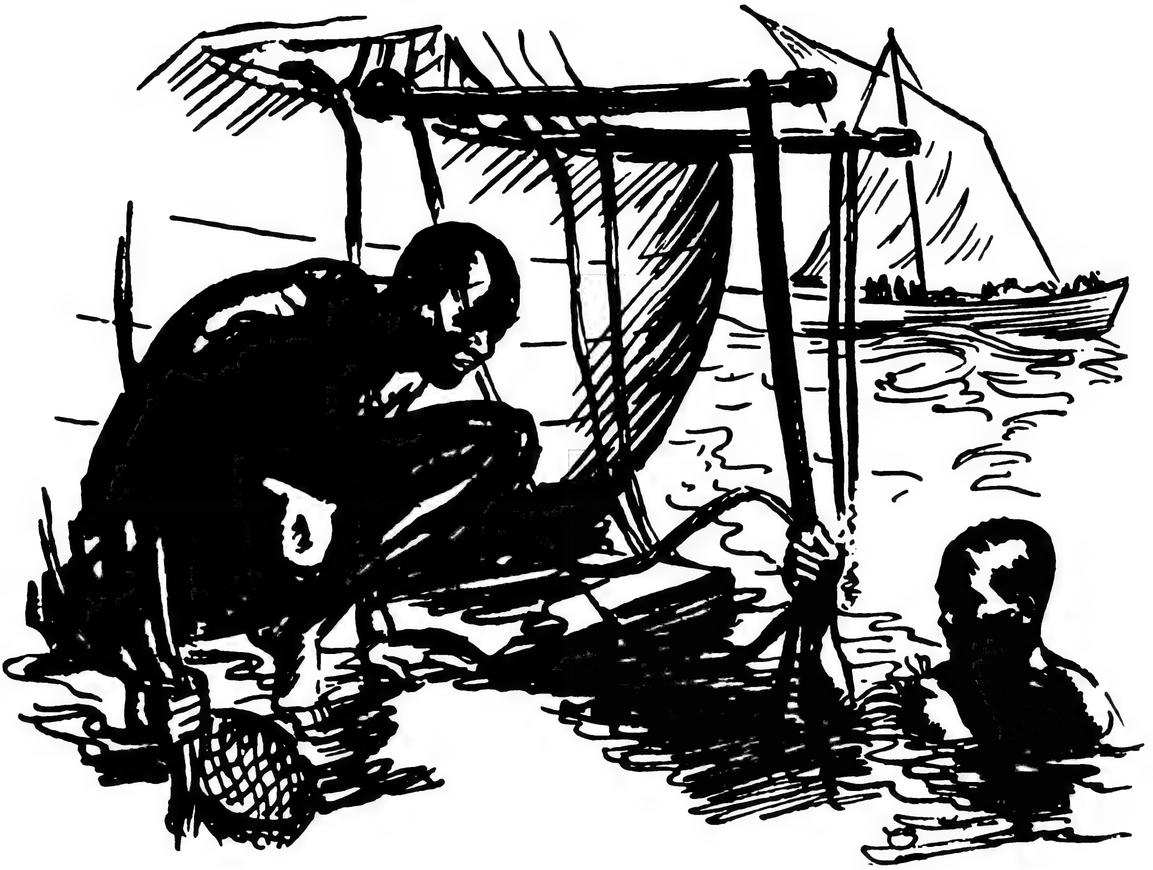
I nodded. "He must have been half mad, this Grutter," I stated. "But clever, at that."

Brooks reached for the cigars. There was a faint smile playing about his eyes.

"Three miles up!" he muttered. "He picked a good spot—but if he'd got you Mac, I'd never have forgiven myself for sending you up."

I groaned, and grabbed three of the long, black ones.

"That goes for me, too," I stated, and reached for a match.



HOW Todd happened to drift in there is of no moment. Pearl Town during a pearl-fishing is not a place for formality. A few weeks before the fishing, the white sands burn forgotten under the tropic sun. The crystal waters of the Gulf of Manaar wash in serried surges to the low reddish coast line, with its background of Ceylon jungle; and the sea birds soar and call against the solitude.

A few days after the great banks of pearl oysters are thrown open for a six or seven weeks' fishing, fifty thousand humans throng the pole and mat shelters of Pearl Town. The world is there: Chinese, Tamil, Spaniard, Portuguese, Hindu, Singhalese, Arab, Jew, Dutch, English, American, Philippino, Burmese: these and many more! The world and its brother, of a truth.

No brother had Todd—the lean, tanned American. Not much of anything for that matter. A change of clothes, such as they were; papers in order; and about a thousand rupees in a money belt next to his skin.

The rupees earned Todd a headache and the acquaintance of Stauss, the Dutchman. It happened in the evening, after the pearling fleet had been towed in to the shore, and the shells had been sorted in the government koddu, one-third to the divers and two-thirds to the government.

Todd, tired of the babel of tongues and feverish surging crowds of natives, walked to the outskirts, where the cadjan huts thinned and the night was cleaner and quieter. His strolling steps finally brought him to the dark edge of the jungle. There he lit a cigaret and walked slowly along the line of trees, his sun helmet in his left hand.

The cigaret marked him out.

Todd neither saw nor heard the dark shadow that slipped up behind him on the soft sand. There was no warning—only a burst of sparks in his head as a sand bag crashed down. He dropped without a sound.

Over him the shadow bent. Swift fingers searched his inert form. A grunt of satisfaction sounded as the money belt was located. A sharp knife slit the clothes over it, and the strap of the belt—would have slit Todd's throat also, if he had come to his senses and resisted. But he lay limp. The belt jerked free. The fingers

Out of the NIGHT

A Novelette of Pearl Fishing off the Coast of Ceylon

By

T. T. FLYNN

explored him hastily again for anything that had been overlooked. Cigarets, matches, three crumpled rupee notes in the coat pocket, went also. The shadow straightened up and flitted off into the night. Todd sprawled unconscious, a dark blot against the lighter sand.

When Stauss, the Dutchman, passed that way ten minutes later, Todd was still there.

Stauss had been out into the night on some errand of his own; no matter what. He came swiftly, for all his apparent bulk, and was right on top of the dark blot before he noticed it. He stepped high and leaped over, to avoid treading on it, and then whipped out a box of matches and struck a light.

Todd lay on his side, with his right arm stretched out. He might have been dead from the looks of him. Stauss held the match low and moved it the length of Todd's figure. When the match burned down he tossed it on the sand and struck another. Holding it with his left hand, he grasped Todd's shoulder with his right and turned him over, so that the feeble light fell upon his features.

Nothing escaped Stauss's eyes, from the cracks in the leather of Todd's shoes, the worn cloth of his white drill suit, to the lines in his lean, tanned face. He looked twice at Todd's face, did Stauss. "So," he muttered, through his short, tawny beard. "So!"

The second match burned out. Stauss pitched it after the first and plunged his big hand inside Todd's shirt. The heart was beating steadily.

Stauss said again: "So!"

He stood up and considered a moment. Then, his mind apparently made up, he bent, picked up the sun helmet, lifted Todd's lean body easily and strode off through the night, along the beach.

The sandbag had struck hard. Todd was out a full hour. He came to by degrees—first a hazy period of consciousness, then a gradual lifting of the fog which bound his brain; finally a full realization of what had happened, of the splitting pain which throbbed in his head, and of the fact that he was not stretched on coarse sand. His hand, lying limply at his side, felt leather. He forced his eyes open. Light rays struck them. He blinked and winced as the pains in his head grew worse.

A voice near him asked: "Can you understand me?"

Startled, Todd jerked his eyes open again. The voice belonged to a woman; it was soft, low and pleasant. He was on his back, could see nothing but the dark beams of a low ceiling. He made shift to turn on his side, and squinted his eyes against the light rays, which were stronger, now that he looked toward them.

There was a woman; he saw her indistinctly; then more clearly as his eyes focused. She was standing a few feet away, looking down at him with close attention.

Todd experienced a shock, two shocks in fact. The first that there should be a white woman looking down at him with close attention. The second that she should be young and pretty and fresh. That was it, fresh. This young woman was not of the shady corners of the far places. She was not soiled by contact with life and a continuous battle of wits. Her features were frank, open, her gaze direct; a good woman—girl, rather.

TODD stared in wonderment, and as he did so became aware that the support under him was moving slightly, the floor also, and the low ceiling overhead. The truth burst upon him—he was on a boat! Startled, he swung his feet over to the floor and forced himself to a sitting posture. The effort sent extra waves of pain shooting through his head. He closed his eyes and put his left hand to his forehead.

The door swung open while he was still thinking. A man of huge bulk came in, cat-footed for all his weight. He shut the door, stepped to the middle of the floor and looked down at Todd.

"How," Todd asked, "do I happen to be sitting here?"

Stauss shrugged and faced back.

"I found you stretched out at the edge of the jungle. You were as dead—but living. I knew not where you belonged. I could not stand and watch you. I carried you to my small boat and brought you out to my schooner. Simple! So?"

"Simple," Todd agreed. "And kind! You have my thanks! I might have had my throat slit for the clothes I have on."

The other nodded. "Yes, these places are bad! One day deserted; the next crowded. One finds the good and the bad."

"I found the bad," Todd observed ruefully.

"What did they find, mynheer?"

Todd had already assured himself that his money belt was gone, and his pockets empty. "Everything," he answered briefly.

"So? You haf perhaps other resources?"

"I have, at the rest house," Todd said grimly, "one bag with a change of clothes."

"You can make a draw . . . ?"

Todd shrugged.

"I have no living relative or connection. But it's all right. I'll get along. It's not the first time."

The other nodded thoughtfully, and passed his right hand over his close-cropped beard.

"Yes," he agreed. "These things do not matter so much. They come; they go. One feasts; one starves—and then one dies. What matter is a little money?"

"What matter?" agreed Todd.

The other suddenly chuckled.

"But a crust of bread, mynheer, will do wonders for the stomach at times! So? I have been there, my friend!"

They smiled together.

"You don't look like it," Todd declared, looking at the well-fed form of the Hollander.

The other chuckled again.

"So?" he said. "One cannot eat one's fill without appearing rich. Enough, mynheer, that is all! I haf my Hildegarde, my daughter; and I haf my little boat. Not much! But can one want more? No, mynheer! I am satisfied! We come; we go. We live—we are content! So?"

Todd nodded, and a sudden weary look settled over his features.

"One could not want more," he agreed. "And now I'll thank you again, for your kindness and take myself off your hands."

HE STOOD up but swayed slightly in spite of himself.

The big tawny-bearded Hollander put up a protesting hand.

"Stay, mynheer!" he rumbled. "There iss no haste! Tomorrow iss another day, and there iss another after that, and more to come! Ease yourself and your head!"

"I will go," Todd insisted. "You have done enough."

The big man looked at him keenly.

"To the rest house—and the change of clothes?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"And with what, mynheer, will you settle the account at the rest house, and buy food to quiet that so restless stomach that a man has?"

Todd shrugged.

"Something will turn up."

"You will work?"

"Yes."

The other showed his strong white teeth in a smile.

"Then stay here and work for me a little, mynheer! I will pay you well for it!"

Todd looked at him in astonishment, and asked: "You need another in the crew?"

"No! Not the crew! Something else—business, if you will. I haf business that needs another hand. You will furnish it—yes?"

"You are not raking up something for—charity?"

"Charity?" The big man's middle shook as he chuckled. "Charity! No, my friend, not charity! Unless you call the chances of death, charity! That throat we haf saved once will perhaps be in danger again, if you furnish a hand in this business! It iss not play, nor kindness, this offer. Your pockets are empty. No one has an interest in your life. I will buy the use of that life. If you keep it, your pockets will be filled. If you lose it—" he shrugged carelessly, and stared at Todd keenly.

The lean, tanned face of the American did not change as the big man talked. When the other was through Todd asked briefly: "Are you crooked?"

The Hollander's mouth snapped shut and a frown etched into his forehead. The next moment it passed and he smiled again: "A dangerous question, mynheer!" he remarked. "Men have died for less than that! But I do not blame you! When one speaks of dangerous business, and slit throats, one hints of dark things! Crooked? That iss hard to decide! A little matter that cannot be settled by law, we will say. It iss no plan to rob the unsuspecting, no scheme to take from the innocent, if you speak in that way!"

"You do not care to tell me?"

"No!" the big man said bluntly. "I am not a fool! I do not tell my business to every man that I pick off the beach! When I know you better, perhaps! Now, I think you are honest, and not too much afraid of your skin! I will haf to know more before I confide my affairs to you, mynheer!"

Todd was not affronted by the blunt retort. He stared into the bearded face of the big man intently. His own face showed no emotion. After a moment he nodded.

"All right," he said quietly. "I'll risk my throat. What do you want me to do?"

"Goot!" the other said heartily. "A man of courage, mynheer! I thought it! You will not regret! My name iss Stauss, mynheer!" He thrust out a huge hand.

Todd shook it, and labeled himself in turn. "Todd," he said. "American."

"I haf lived there," Stauss stated. "New York, New Orleans, Frisco—many places."

Todd nodded, and stepped back and seated himself once more.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

Stauss stroked his short beard slowly.

"In the morning," he replied, "I will tell you the first thing. Tonight we will rest. You will sleep in the after cabin with me. There iss a spare berth. I will show you." He led the way from the small room. Todd followed, balancing as the boards underfoot canted a bit with the swells of the sea.

DAWN on the Gulf of Manaar is a sight to remember. The great round sun-ball bursts up from the horizon, and the clouds are shot with wondrous colors. They melt away and the hot sunlight strikes the glittering waters into a million gleaming facets.

Pearl Town, which had not quieted through the night, was seething with activity. The pearling fleet had been towed out to the rocky paars, where the oysters lie in five to eight fathoms. The high-prowed dhoneys had cast off from the steam trawlers and were jockeying for position, their sails slatting in the breeze, their crowded decks filled with confusion. The day had begun.

Todd was on the deck of Stauss's schooner shortly after the coming of light.

He had not been there more than a minute when steps sounded behind him. He turned and saw Stauss. The big man boomed: "Goot morning, mynheer! You slept well?"

"Fine!"

"Goot! You are hungry, eh?"

"I could eat."

"So! Hildegarde will haf food for us before long. She iss cook—I will haf no other. Ah, mynheer, she can cook! The man who marries her will be fortunate!"

Todd thought of her, and found no cause to disagree with Stauss's declaration. Some man would get a pretty wife, a good homemaker. He felt a trifle envious at the last thought. There had been France when he was a stripling; after the war, restless wandering, here, there, everywhere over the wide world. Home had become nothing but a name.

Stauss broke in on his thoughts. "You like the *Spreewald*, my little boat?"

"Yes. I know more about steam than sail—but she looks stout."

"Your eyes are goot! On the *Spreewald* we haf sailed everywhere, my little Hildegarde and I."

Todd gazed down the length of deck, at the two masts, the furled sails, the man in the stern. "How big a crew do you carry?" he asked.

"Three men, I haf now; Malays from Singapore. If there is need of another when the wind comes quickly, my Hildegarde helps out. She can handle sail like a man!" There was a note of pride in Stauss's voice, and after that he stood silent a moment, stroking his short-cropped, tawny beard slowly.

Todd seized that time to bring the conversation on the subject nearest his heart. "What," he queried, "am I to do today?"

"You will hunt a man."

"What?"

"A man! A black man, mynheer, that I would locate. Perhaps he iss here with the pearlers. We will see."

"You mean," Todd demanded, "that you want me to try and locate a certain black man among the thousands that are in Pearl Town?"

"You haf it, mynheer. A black man that I haf looked for on every pearling bank in this part of the world."

"How can I pick such a man out? Have you a picture of him?"

"You will not need a picture. His chest, mynheer, iss where you will mark him. It will haf a great scar running from the right shoulder to the bottom of the left ribs."

"Suppose it is covered by a shirt?"

"It will not be. If he iss here, he will probably be diving for shell. You will take the little petrol tender and cruise among the pearling boats, watching every diver."

"Why don't you do it?" Todd asked bluntly.

The big man frowned. "Why, iss no matter of yours!" he said curtly. "But I will tell you this once! I am known to the man! If I am seen, he will be warned."

"Your boat is here!"

"They—he does not know her by this name!"

"All right," Todd agreed. "Where's the launch?"

"Come, I will show you." They walked back along the deck.

The brown-skinned Malay was still in the stern. He looked at Todd curiously.

The launch was secure to the stern. The off-shore wind had pushed it out to the length of the rope, where it rode the slight swell lightly. It would hold two or three comfortably, looked like a good sea boat, and had a spray hood over the fore part.

"How's the engine?" Todd asked.

"Goot! You will haf no trouble!"

They stood in the stern a little longer. Todd borrowed a cigaret from Stauss, and their talk turned to other things than the business at hand. Todd was aware of an increasing liking for the big Hollander. They were laughing together when a bell rang amidships.

"Breakfast," Stauss stated, and led the way below.

Todd enjoyed that meal in the tiny saloon of the *Spreewald*. His eyes often followed the flaxen-haired Hildegarde as she moved about, attending to their wants. She in turn was not shy, and laughed and talked with him as though he had been on the boat months, instead of a nameless wanderer carried off the beach. With some women it would have made a great difference. Todd was conscious of the fact, and grateful to her accordingly.

After the breakfast the two men had another cigaret, and then the work of the day began. They hauled the little tender alongside. Stauss got into it with Todd and explained the engine.

Todd knew machinery and there was no trouble about that.

He would be gone past the lunch hour,

so they put a can of water in the tender, and Hildegarde packed an ample lunch. Thus equipped, and fortified with a handful of Stauss's cigarets, Todd cast off, and started the motor. The *Spreewald* quickly dropped astern. The little tender headed out to the open sea and the pearling fleet.

Shell gathering was in full swing when the launch reached the fleet of dhoneys. Todd steered for the nearest one, a bright yellow boat whose spars and riggings were hung with turbans and bright colored pieces of clothing.

Full twenty men crowded the deck, and as the launch drew in and Todd throttled the engine, gay voices hailed him. He waved, shut the motor off and drifted in closer, where he could plainly see the divers on that side of the dhoney. They were all busy, and gave him no heed.

EACH diver's manduck, or helper on the deck of the dhoney, had two ropes which ran down into the water. One rope had a stone or metal sinker on the end, the other a net basket. The diver would snap a clip on his nose, thrust his foot into the loop about the sinker, and descend swiftly to the bottom with the net in his hand. There he would gather oysters for a minute or more. A jerk on the rope signaled his manduck to haul him up to the surface, take the shells out of the net and pack them in a bag on the deck of the dhoney. Holding to a rope, the diver would rest on the surface a bit, then inflate his lungs, seize the net and go down once more. At intervals the divers would haul themselves to the deck of the dhoney and rest for a bit.

The manducks and other occupants of the dhoney's deck were chattering, hauling on lengths of rope, shifting bags of shells, moving about, until all seemed confusion. Yet in spite of the lack of order, the divers came up and went down with monotonous regularity, and net after net, filled with shells, was drawn over the side.

The water was crystal blue. When the divers came to the surface Todd had no difficulty in seeing the whole of their chests. He also watched the manducks and other men on the deck of the boat. Along one side he drifted, and then started the motor and did the same on the other side. There was no man with a great scar on his chest. He steered to the next dhoney, a blue hull with a white stripe around the top part.

No better luck waited him there, nor at the third boat, nor fourth, nor fifth. He took his time, made sure that the crew of each boat had been examined thoroughly. Hours passed. The sun mounted higher overhead and the heat increased. Todd had on a sun helmet, but there was no awning and he felt the glare severely.

He was just finishing with the nineteenth dhoney when a signal sounded from one of the towing trawlers and all diving ceased for the day. A launch put out from the trawler and the government sealer started the rounds of all the dhoneys, to seal the bags of oyster shells, so that none might be opened before the whole catch was divided in the government koddu and government got its two-thirds.

There were no more men in the water. Many of the Arab divers had wrapped themselves in dirty white or colored burnooses, and other divers had donned various bits of clothing. Todd could do no more that day. He thankfully gave the motor full throttle and turned the bow of the launch back toward the *Spreewald*.

His face was red from the sun glare on the water; he was hot, uncomfortable, and none too well pleased with his work. As the boat rocked over the swells, he opened the lunch and ate. It was good. His thoughts turned to Stauss's daughter. A fine cook! Pretty too! Todd did not know when he had seen a figure that was as lithe and graceful as hers.

Stauss and two of the Malay crew came to the rail of the *Spreewald* as the launch slowed and drifted alongside. One of the Malays jumped to the bow of the launch and tossed the painter to his partner, who made it fast. Todd scrambled to the deck of the *Spreewald* and left the smaller boat to the Malays.

Stauss greeted him. "How goes it, mynheer? You look red as a pickled beet! The sun iss hot! So?"

"Darned hot!" Todd growled. "I feel like I've been boiled!"

A laugh rumbled up from Stauss's chest, and his teeth gleamed through his short beard as he smiled.

"So!" he exclaimed. "Hot iss it, mynheer? Well, we will see about that! A little awning, eh? It can be done with no trouble. But that later! What did you find?" He looked at Todd sharply.

Todd shrugged.

"No man with a scar on his chest!"

Stauss fingered his beard.

"You looked close, eh?"

"Close enough to make sure there was no such man on any boat I examined!"

"How many?"

"Nineteen!"

Stauss shook his head.

"There are many more boats, mynheer. A hundred and fifty, eh? You will haf much looking to do yet. That face will be redder!" In spite of his obvious disappointment, the big man laughed heartily.

Todd smiled slightly also, and then lifted his sun helmet as Hildegarde came up from below and joined them.

"Back?" she asked easily. "You had a nice trip, Mr. Todd?"

"Nice—but warm."

"And the lunch?"

"Fine!" Todd assured her heartily. "I haven't had such a lunch in a long time! Never, would be nearer the truth!"

She flushed with pleasure, and looked at him smilingly, and then at her father. Stauss put an arm about her shoulders affectionately. "He iss a wise man," he said, laughing, "who speaks to the cook with soft words! His plate will never be empty!"

She laughed with him, and looked at Todd and said: "Your reward is waiting below. I have a big pitcher of lime juice and water. Do you want some?"

"Do I? Lead me to it!"

On that gay note they went below.

That afternoon the Malays rigged an awning over the after part of the launch.

The next morning Todd went out again, with another lunch and a fresh supply of cigarets.

The awning made the sun more bearable. The lunch was better, if possible. But of the man with the scarred chest there was no sign. When Todd returned to the *Spreewald* in the afternoon, Stauss received the news with a shrug. "If he iss here, you will find him. Patience! There is much time before the fleet breaks up!"

THE days passed. Each twenty-four hours saw the three white people a little friendlier. Stauss drew Todd out on his past life, and in turn told a little of his own. His manner grew more cordial.

The fourth day, when Todd reported no results, Stauss seemed about to say something, then thought better of it and remained silent. After a moment he said: "The man may not be here. We will see! I can wait."

The fifth and sixth days passed without results. Todd began to believe that there was no such man around Pearl Town. It seemed like a foolish hunt anyway. But he kept on, to the best of his ability. That was the concern of Stauss.

The eighth day, while working slowly down the side of a blue-hulled dhoney, watching the divers and men on the deck, Todd suddenly stiffened and took the cigaret from his mouth. A tall Arab, naked save for a loin cloth, had stalked from the middle of the boat to the side. He stood there, talking to a manduck who held two ropes. Plain across the front of his broad chest was a great scar! It began at the right shoulder and ran down to the bottom of the left ribs!

There could be no mistake! Todd took a deep breath, and stared at the features of the tall Arab. The man's nose was big and flat, his lips thick and, it seemed to Todd, cruel looking. A small growth of black, kinky beard on the cheeks and chin gave added depth to the impression of cruelty.

The Arab had evidently been resting. He ended the conversation with the manduck, snapped a nose clip, which hung on a thong around his neck, on his nose, and stepped off into the water.

Todd noted the number painted on the bow of the dhoney, and then started the launch toward the *Spreewald* at full speed.

His return was early. As he came over the rail Stauss met him and asked eagerly: "You haf news, mynheer?"

Todd nodded.

"I found a man with a big scar on his chest!" he said, and described the tall Arab.

Stauss listened closely, his emotions concealed behind his beard. When Todd finished, Stauss nodded and spoke, his voice suddenly was stern, almost menacing.

"It iss the man! You haf done well! I thought he would be here for the fishing!"

Todd lit a cigaret, asked quietly: "What is next?"

The eyes of the big Hollander narrowed.

"It iss where the danger begins!" he declared. "Your throat will not be safe from now on, mynheer! You like that? So?"

Todd's lean face did not change. "I'll take care of my throat," he said evenly. "What is there to do?"

Stauss looked at him searchingly. Said abruptly: "I haf watched you close, mynheer! Now, I trust you more! Come to the stern, where there are no ears. I will tell you what to do this evening."

In the stern of the *Spreewald* Stauss spoke his wishes. Todd's eyes widened as he listened. Puzzlement crossed his features, for Stauss did not tell him what was at the bottom of the queer directions. But the orders were clear and specific, and Todd nodded and assured Stauss, "It will be done as you say."

Later in the afternoon when the prow of the last dhoney had pushed into the beach sand, and its shells had been carried into the koddu, Stauss handed Todd a tiny bag of chamois skin

"Here iss the honey!" he rumbled. "The flies are there!" He nodded toward Pearl Town.

Todd took the chamois bag, put it in the inside pocket of his coat and buttoned the front of the coat up.

"I'll take care of them," he said coolly.

"Goot! I know it, mynheer! I trust you! So? Here also iss the rupees you will need." Stauss plunged his hand into his coat pocket and brought forth a small roll of rupee notes.

Todd pocketed them and asked: "How about a small knife? I'll need one."

"That iss so! Here!" Stauss reached into his trouser's pocket and brought out a stout pocket knife. "That iss all, eh?" he queried as he handed it over.

"I think so."

"Goot! I wish you luck, mynheer. If you return before dark that throat will not be in so much danger."

Todd smiled slightly. "I'll try," he said, and stepped to the rail and climbed down into the launch.

Five minutes later the *Spreewald* was dwindling astern, and crowded, hectic Pearl Town was nearing rapidly.

Todd steered to the low, narrow, pile-supported landing which ran out over the water. There he secured the launch, walked to the sand beach and made his way to the koddu. This was his goal.

Todd strolled to that open air market, stopping at a small shop on the way and purchasing a palm-leaf bag. On the outer edge of the market hollow he stopped, and looked dubiously at the surging crowd of buyers. He wanted to get to one of the divers and purchase several dozen oysters, but the prospect of becoming one of the mob was not exactly inviting.

While he hesitated a small urchin, clad in a ragged cotton sarong and tattered shirt, came up, halted near him and surveyed the scene. Todd had an inspiration. He stepped over to the boy and spoke the native word for oyster: "Sippi."

The boy wheeled and stared at him. Todd took some rupee notes from his pocket, held them and the bag forth and requested: "Buy sippi for me. One rupee shall be yours for it."

The boy understood. His teeth gleamed in a sudden, wide grin. He ducked his head and said: "Yes, sahib, I will do it."

Todd gave him the bag and the money. The boy clutched them tight and darted into the crowd.

Todd tried to keep an eye on him, but the slight figure was lost to view in a moment. Minutes passed. Todd waited patiently.

More minutes passed. There was no sign of the boy. Todd began to grow uneasy. Thieves swarmed in every corner of Pearl Town. It would be a simple matter for the boy to keep right on through the market, come out the other side, and scurry to cover with the rupees.

Then, when he was almost on the point of starting off to buy another bag and do the job himself, the boy wriggled out of a gesturing group and came towards him, carrying the loaded palm-leaf bag in his arms.

"There were many buyers, sahib," he said apologetically when he came up.

Todd took the bag, said approvingly: "You have done well." He gave the boy a rupee.

The urchin clutched it eagerly, and stowed it in the recesses of his sarong. Then, cheerfully, he asked: "The sahib searches for pearls?"

"Going to have a try at it," Todd answered good naturedly. "Are you going to buy shell with the rupee?"

"I," said the boy frankly, "will spend

my rupee for cakes. He who buys a few shells remains poor. Only those who buy shells by the thousand at the government auction in the evening, find wealth."

"You don't think I will?"

"Who knows? The sahib is not a poor man," the boy answered politely.

Todd turned away, saying: "We shall see."

NATIVES who had bought small lots of shell from the divers were sitting on the ground on every side, opening their purchases, carefully examining the meat for pearls and the inside of the shells for blister pearls which, though only half round, could be set in brooches and rings.

Todd went only a few yards and stopped under the spreading branches of a tulip tree. As he sank to the ground and dumped the oysters out before him, he saw that the ragged urchin had followed and was standing a few feet away, watching with interest. Todd smiled at him, took Stauss's knife from his pocket, and picked up an oyster. The boy moved a step closer.

Todd knew the proper procedure in searching for pearls. He thrust the knife between the edges of the shell and forced them apart. Then with a finger felt around the edge of the halves for blister pearls. Next he pressed the flesh with his knife and searched through carefully.

Luck was with him on the first shell. He found a small seed pearl.

When the urchin saw him pull the pearl forth and inspect it, he came a step nearer.

"The sahib has good fortune," he observed with a flash of white teeth.

Todd grinned back.

"It will do for a starter," he answered. "But its not worth much. Want it?"

The boy's eyes widened.

"The sahib jests," he retorted unbelievingly.

For answer Todd held the little seed pearl forth. The boy held out his hand doubtfully. Todd dropped the pearl in it.

The boy looked at it closely, as though he could not believe it real. When the fact that he was the owner of a real pearl, small though it was, penetrated, he took a deep breath and smiled broadly at Todd. "May ten thousand blessings shower down upon the sahib, and his path lead to many riches!" he exclaimed fervently.

Todd nodded, and went on with his work.

The next two or three oysters contained no pearls. Five oysters Todd opened and then stopped to light a cigaret.

He did more in the next few minutes than smoke the cigaret. In the inside pocket of his coat was the small chamois bag which Stauss had handed him on the *Spreewald*. Todd thrust his hand carelessly into the pocket and brought the little bag forth, keeping it concealed in his hand. Still carelessly, he put it in his left coat pocket, and with that hand worked at the draw-string until the mouth of the chamois bag came open and the contents rolled out into the pocket. After that he tossed the cigaret away and took up another shell.

The boy's interest had not diminished. He watched closely.

Todd dropped his left hand into his coat pocket carelessly, and brought it out almost at once—with something crooked in the hollow of the little finger. His next moves were frank and open, apparently. He felt around inside the shell, and then pushed the meat back with the edge of the knife and began to feel through the meat with his left hand. The move that deposited inside the shell the object the little finger held, was invisible.

The next moment Todd uttered a grunt, bent forward, and worked at the oyster meat. When he straightened up again the fingers of his left hand held a huge, gleaming pearl.

The urchin's eyes opened wide. His jaw dropped. He stood speechless and stared.

Todd held it up in full view and inspected it critically.

"The sahib is blessed with good fortune!" the boy gasped.

Todd took out his handkerchief, spread it on the ground at his right hand and put the pearl upon it.

"Fortune comes to all at some time," he answered smilingly. "Perhaps this day is mine. Who knows?" He dropped his left hand carelessly into his coat pocket, and then picked up another shell.

Fortune indeed seemed to be smiling on Todd that day. This shell also contained an immense pearl. Todd, when he pulled it forth almost chuckled at the expression on the boy's face.

"Two, sahib!" the boy exclaimed.

"Two," assented Todd gravely. "Perhaps there are more." He laid the second pearl on the handkerchief with the first.

A white sahib sitting on the ground, opening shell like any common native, was an unusual sight. More than one curious glance had been cast at Todd.

As Todd laid the second pearl on the handkerchief, a white bearded old Hindu, wearing a turban, baggy, dirty-white trousers that came almost to his ankles, and a greasy black coat, caught sight of the handkerchief, the two milky globules on it, and came over to the side of the boy.

"Look!" the boy burst out excitedly to the old man. "Three pearls the sahib has found already! One seed pearl, which he gave me out of the greatness of his heart, and those!" He pointed dramatically to the handkerchief.

Todd did not look up. Keeping a close eye on the handkerchief and its precious freight, he dropped his left hand into his coat pocket a third time and then picked up another shell.

This time there were two pairs of eyes to deceive. There was no trouble about it. When Todd brought forth a third pearl the old Hindu was as wonderstruck as the youth.

"The sahib has the luck of twenty men!" he exclaimed.

"I myself purchased the shells for him!" the boy said proudly.

The old man looked at him scornfully.

"Spawn of a jackal!" he snapped. "Think you your touch had aught to do with it?"

"Who knows?" the boy grinned. "The pearls are there!"

The old man snorted and ignored the urchin from then on.

Another passerby, seeing the two of them watching Todd closely, drifted over and joined them. To him the boy told of the four pearls, and pointed to the handkerchief to support his story. Before the boy finished, a fourth person, a tall lanky Tamil, joined them. The boy had to repeat his story over again.

Todd paid no attention to any of them. Kept his head bent, his eyes on the pearls, and his fingers occupied opening oysters. When his hand dropped into his coat pocket the fourth time, and he found a fourth pearl in the next oyster, the group of watchers had grown to ten.

Exclamations, staccato bursts of speech, flew thick when Todd laid the fourth pearl on the handkerchief.

Todd seized that moment to speak to the boy. Taking more rupee notes from his right coat pocket, he said: "Find the same man who sold these shells, and buy all he has! If there is not enough rupees, bring him to me and I will give him the rest! There will be two rupees for you this time!"

The boy darted off and two men in the back of the watching group hastened after him. Todd saw them go, and grinned to himself.

He opened no more oysters until the boy returned—empty handed.

"Sahib!" he panted, "I found the man, and desired to buy the remaining shells in the bottom of his sack! There were but a few, and he started to take my money! Then two men rushed up, sahib, and offered thrice the regular price! I said that you would pay it, if the shells were brought to you! But the two men waved rupee notes before the diver's nose! He took them, sahib! The shells are gone!" He handed the rupee notes back sadly.

Todd handed him two rupees and shrugged.

"Thrice the price is too high," he said. "Perhaps there will be no pearls in them. Greed brings its reward of poverty." Approving nods greeted his words.

In the face of intent watching, Todd opened another shell and found another great pearl.

Cries of wonder broke out.

"Never was like seen on these pearling banks!" one old-white-bearded man exclaimed. "Five such pearls in a lot of ten thousand sheels I have seen—but never in so few! The sahib is touched with the rod of good fortune this day!"

THE fifth pearl joined the others on the handkerchief. Many more natives, attracted by the crowd in front of Todd, came up and ranged themselves about. The boy stood in the front ranks and loudly called the attention of everyone to the good luck that was showering down on the sahib. He boldly declared that it was because of the generous gift of the first seed pearl. Many were inclined to agree with him.

Most of the divers from the market place passed by that spot on their way to the Diver's Bathing Pool, where they cleaned the dried salt water from their skins. Many of them, seeing the interested crowd, stopped and stared also.

Todd found a sixth pearl and a sigh of wonder ran though the watchers.

Three more shells remained unopened. Out of these three Todd took two more large pearls. By this time he was entirely surrounded by a tense, packed mass of watchers, in which a score of races and types were represented.

Eight pearls there were. They lay on the square of cloth like great milky tears. Todd lit a cigaret, inhaled deeply, and stared at them reflectively.

At that moment there was a stir in the watchers. A man pushed forward. He was a swarthy, lean-faced native of southern India, clad in white nankeen trousers, held up by a vivid sash, and wearing a short Zouave jacket and a red fez. In his hand he carried a small metal box.

The newcomer's garb and manner marked him out. He was one of the cheddies or pearl buyers, who purchased from the finders and resold in Colombo and Calcutta. He looked down at the pearls, and then spoke to Todd suavely—"The sahib will sell the pearls?"

"I don't think so," Todd replied.

"I will pay you well for them."

"I don't care to sell."

"If the sahib permits," the man persisted politely, "I will grade the pearls and make him an offer."

"You may do that," Todd assented. "But I don't think I'll sell."

Undaunted, the buyer sank down in front of Todd with his legs crossed. Taking a small key from the pocket of his Zouave jacket, he unlocked the metal box. From it he lifted a small square of black velvet, and ten little brass sieves, each having holes of a different size.

While Todd, and the others crowded about, watched closely, the pearl buyer picked up the eight pearls and dropped them into one of the little brass sieves.

Three pearls fell thru the holes. The buyer placed them together on one corner of the black velvet. The remaining five pearls he dropped into another sieve. Only one fell thru the holes of this, which were slightly larger than the first. The one pearl he placed at another corner of the black velvet.

So from sieve to sieve he went, until all the pearls had been graded into their respective sizes. Then, carefully, skillfully, he graded them for form and orient.

Todd's eyes never left the man's fingers; he was taking no chances on a substitution.

After the pearls had been graded thoroughly, the man studied them thoughtfully for some moments. Finally, he looked at Todd and said:

"I will pay the sahib forty thousand rupees for the lot."

Todd shook his head.

"I am a poor man but my living comes from the buying and selling of pearls. I will pay the sahib forty-one thousand rupees."

Again Todd shook his head.

The buyer studied him closely. "A last offer, sahib," he said, "forty-two thousand rupees. It is a high price! There is no other buyer who will give you more. I, who have bought pearls everywhere, assure you that this is so."

"No," Todd said firmly. "The price may be all right—but I don't want to sell them tonight. I'll take the pearls out to my boat and think it over. You may come out there and see me about it again, if you want to. I might change my mind."

"Where," asked the buyer, "is the sahib's boat?"

"The *Spreewald*," Todd told him, carelessly, so that all around might hear. "She's anchored offshore a little way. A two-masted schooner. I'll be here a day or so longer, anyway."

The buyer nodded.

"I will make the same offer to the sahib again," he said. "In that time, if another makes a greater offer, I will meet it. But none will. I have gone to the highest price that a man may give and make money for himself."

He lifted the little square of black velvet by the sides, ran the pearls together in the center, and held the velvet out towards Todd. Todd put forth his hand. The buyer tilted the pearls into it. While the man was repacking the little brass sieves and the velvet in the box, Todd dropped the pearls into the left pocket of his coat and stood up.

He was full six feet tall, himself, and had little trouble in seeing over the heads of most of the men who were gathered about. His eyes fell on another tall man, who was standing a little back from the front. It was an Arab, clad in a dark burnoose!

Big, the man's nose was, and his lips were thick and cruel. On his cheeks and chin was a short kinky black beard. The chest beneath the burnoose was hidden, but Todd knew that across it, from right shoulder to the bottom of the left ribs, a great scar ran. It was the diver he had searched for and found!

The big Arab had been watching Todd with a fierce hawk-like gaze. When Todd's eyes fell on him, he looked down and appeared to lose interest.

There was nothing more to be done. Light was fading fast. Remembering Stauss's warning about his throat, conscious that with a fortune of pearls in his pocket, he might be attacked any time after dark, Todd pushed thru the crowd and walked hastily toward the boat landing.

No incident occurred on the way. The launch was where he had left it, undisturbed. He stepped in, cast off, started the motor swept around in a short circle, and headed out from land.

A short distance out he glanced back at the beach. It may have been his fancy, but Todd was certain he saw a tall figure, clad in a burnoose, skulking at one corner of the bamboo wall of the koddu. As he looked the figure drew back out of sight. When he looked around several moments later, from his place in the boat, the figure was not visible.

Todd brought forth the little chamois bag, now empty, and returned the eight large pearls to it.

"I don't know what it's all about," he remarked aloud, "but I've been rich for a little while." He grinned at the thought, and then lasped into musing silence. What was it all about? What did Stauss want with the large Arab? Why had he been ordered to go through with the strange performance of placing the pearl in shells and then finding them, for all the world to see? Was it chance that had given him the impression the big Arab was more interested than the other watchers? Todd was still thinking about it when the *Spreewald* loomed out of the rapidly thickening dusk. He cut the motor off and ran silently alongside.

STAUSS was waiting at the rail. He caught the rope Todd tossed him and made it fast. When Todd stood on the deck of the *Spreewald,* Stauss demanded: "Well, mynheer . . . . .?"

"Here are the pearls," Todd said, taking the little chamois bag from his left coat pocket and holding it out.

Stauss took it indifferently. "What's happened?" he demanded abruptly.

"I did as you said. Bought shells, pretended to find pearls in them, and let the fact be known to everyone."

Stauss looked at him searchingly.

"You see someone you haf seen before?" he asked intently.

"The fellow with the scar on his chest. He was in the crowd that was watching me."

"Ahhhh!" Stauss exhaled with satisfaction. "You haf made no mistake, mynheer?" he asked. "You are certain that it was the same man?"

"Absolutely!"

Stauss's great fists clenched. He stared out over the water at the lights which were winking out on shore. "Goot!" he said grimly. "I find them! They haf taken the bait! The time has come!"

Neither Stauss nor Todd heard Hildegarde come silently toward them. She caught the last words of her father. Stepping to his side she asked: "Who has taken bait? What time has come?"

"I haf found the man with the scar on his chest!" Stauss replied slowly. "I haf baited a trap! Now—I will settle!"

There was cold menace in the man's tones. Todd fancied that a slight shiver ran through the girl. She said: "Perhaps it is not the same man."

"There is no mistake! But one man will haf a scar from his right shoulder to his left ribs! It iss the one!"

She put her hand on her father's arm. Todd could not see her face, but her voice was troubled as she spoke. "I—I am afraid! Let it drop! Take the *Spreewald* up into the Mediterranean! If—if anything happened to you, I could not bear it!"

"That iss woman's talk!" Stauss said impatiently. "I haf waited seven years! Now you ask me to forget! Haf you forgotten your brother?"

"No—I am remembering him," she replied slowly. "I—I—am afraid for you."

"No!" said Stauss harshly. "No!"

A heavy silence fell over the three. Todd did not know what they spoke of but he sensed portentous undercurrents. Some bit of destiny had come to a head in that out of the way corner of the world, and the three of them were caught up in its swirl. That Stauss intended to hold to some predetermined, ruthless course, there was no doubt.

After a moment Stauss said: "I will haf a game of solitaire. Goot night!" He left them abruptly.

Todd and the girl stood in silence for another minute. Finally Todd said slowly, "I did not know that you had a brother."

"He has been dead seven years," she answered gravely. "He was—murdered."

"I'm sorry! I didn't know!"

They were standing by the rail. She turned and stared out over the water. Todd faced about also. In the darkness his left hand touched her right wrist. Her skin was soft, warm. Todd pulled his hand away, sharply. For some reason he suddenly felt awkward, self conscious. To cover it he spoke quickly.

"It is hard to think that all those people will be gone from Pearl Town in a few weeks."

"Yes," she agreed. "They scatter like dry leaves in a wind, when the pearling season is over."

"I'll scatter with them," Todd stated regretfully.

"You will go home?"

"I have no home,"

"Ah, I am sorry. The *Spreewald* is all I have."

Another silence fell on them. They stood side by side and stared out over the water. Rather wistfully Todd said presently, "It would be nice to have a home to go to. I'm getting tired of wandering around."

"Wandering is nice—but home is nice also." she said slowly. "Sometimes I wish for one."

The soft perfume of her hair drifted on the night air. Todd was acutely conscious of her presence. Sudden regret that their ways would soon part, ran through him. He did not speak of it, however.

A full half hour they lingered by the rail. She brought the conversation to an end, saying, "I must go to father. Perhaps I can talk him out of this thing he has planned. It is dangerous, I know."

"He seems determined."

"He has thought of little else for seven years," she said gravely.

"If I can do anything to help, ask me."

"Thank you," she answered. "It is better that you have nothing to do with it. You have done too much already, brought danger on yourself."

"It doesn't matter, if I can help—you."

Her face was not visible in the darkness. She hesitated a moment before replying. Then, low, she replied, "Thank you. Good night." She slipped off in the black shadows that shrouded the deck.

TODD lit a cigaret, leaned his elbows on the rail, and stared pensively out over the dark water. Many thoughts ran through his head as he stood there. What was this thing that Stauss had carried with him for seven years? What had the thick-lipped Arab to do with it? What was Stauss planning to do? By his own words he had baited a trap. Baited it with eight great priceless pearls! And yet, though it was a trap, his daughter feared greatly for him. She knew! She had warned him, a stranger, of danger. How much, Todd wondered, did she care about his welfare?

He was thinking thus when steps sounded behind him. Turning, he saw the large figure of Stauss looming up in the darkness. Stauss rumbled, "You like the night, mynheer?"

"At times."

"This night it iss better you stay below, I think."

"Why?" Todd demanded.

"You haf done your part. Now it iss my turn!"

"I thought," Todd said bluntly, "that I was going to have a share in anything that came up!"

"So? Well, I haf changed my mind! This business is none of yours. There iss no reason why you should risk your neck."

"Has anyone been asking you to keep me out of it?"

Stauss chuckled suddenly.

"The little birds haf been talking in your ears," he rumbled.

"Then I am right?"

"A little. Hildegarde has made me see that the business iss all my own. I will attend to it! This night you will stay below! I will take what comes alone."

She had considered him! The thought filled Todd with elation. But the idea of hiding below while Stauss faced whatever was to come, did not appeal. He said calmly: "I think I will stay on deck tonight."

"It iss better you keep below!" Stauss said flatly.

"Perhaps. But I would rather remain up."

"It might be that you will die before morning!"

"I'll risk it," Todd said coolly.

Stauss chuckled again.

"Well, I haf done what I could," he said with false resignation. "If you are determined to play with fire, I suppose you must. You are a foolish fellow, and brave. My boy, who iss now dead, was like that!" He fell silent a moment. When he spoke again the humor was gone from his voice and his tones were harsh.

"We will watch up all night! It iss better you eat plenty now! I will walk the deck while you are below."

"I'll be back shortly," Todd assured him as he turned away.

Hildegarde gave him food, and as he sat at the small table and ate, she sat on the other side and watched him with a troubled air.

"You are not going to stay up with father?" she asked suddenly.

Todd nodded.

The worry in her face deepened.

"It is dangerous! You need not face it because father chooses to!"

"I know," Todd assured her calmly. "But as long as I want to, is there any reason why I shouldn't?"

"No," she said reluctantly. "Perhaps not. But the affair is none of yours."

Todd smiled slightly as he buttered a slice of bread.

"I don't even know what it's about," he admitted. "But if your father can risk it I guess I can."

Slowly she said: "You should know what it is about."

"I'd like to—if you care to tell me."

"I will! It is to avenge my brother's death! Seven years ago we anchored on the Burma side of the Bay of Bengal. There they go after the shell with diving suits. The pearls are larger, though not so valuable as the Ceylon pearls. My father bought two pearls from a diver. In paying for them he allowed the man to see the well-filled money belt he carried.

"That evening the diver led a gang of thieves on board our boat. My brother, who was on deck, was stabbed from behind. My father came up a moment later and was knifed also, by the Arab he bought the pearls from. The blow glanced off a rib and did not kill him. He caught the man's wrist, tore the knife loose, and slashed the fellow the full length of his chest. Before he could do more he was stabbed in the side. They took his money belt and left him for dead. I—I found them later."

Her face saddened at the thought of that evening, years before. She swallowed and went on, "Brother was dead. Father hovered between life and death for days but finally lived."

"The Arab?" Todd demanded. "Did they catch him?"

"Father didn't know anything about him—save that he must have a big scar across his chest. The authorities were never able to find him. Before we left the place, father swore to hunt until he located the man. For seven years we have sailed up and down this part of the world, always looking for a tall Arab with a long scar across his chest."

Todd laid the slice of bread down on the table.

"You found him?" he said slowly.

"We found him!" she answered gravely.

"And tonight?"

"That man, and others of a certainty, are aware that you have a small fortune in pearls. That you are out here on this boat, away from help. Is it not probable that this man will dc what he has done before successfully?"

"Yes," Todd admitted. "It is."

Her eyes strayed to the ceiling overhead.

"Father will be waiting for them," she said quietly.

Todd thought of the brother who had been struck dead from behind, of her father who had almost died, of the thick-lipped Arab who had watched him with the hawklike gaze. His mouth grew grim.

"Your father and I will be there!" he told her steadily.

For a long moment their eyes locked across the table.

"I will pray to the good God to guard

you both from harm," she said slowly.

Todd pushed his plate away.

"I," he told her gently, "will save my prayers for the time that this business is over. There is much then I wish to—talk about."

A slow faint flush spread up into her fair cheeks. But her eyes did not waver from his. No other word they spoke, yet when Todd got to his feet and left the cramped quarters, he felt giddy with the emotions that were coursing through him.

THE quarter moon had not yet risen; the night was fathomless blackness. Todd stood in the faint spot of light that came up from the open companion, and peered uncertainly around. Stauss hailed him softly from the bow.

"Here, mynheer."

As Todd felt his way forward cautiously, his eyes cleared and he made out the tiny red end of Stauss's cigaret. When he put one between his lips and would have struck a light, Stauss laid a swift detaining hand on his wrist.

"Light from mine! There may be eyes watching us!"

Todd did so. Stauss waited a moment, then said, "You are still determined to spend the night on deck?"

"Yes."

"Once again, I say there may be danger."

"Your daughter has told me what's behind it."

"Ah!" After a moment Stauss exclaimed, "Goot! I am glad she did so! There iss nothing more to keep from you! You know what danger lies ahead! If we are boarded this night the men will come ready to kill. There will be a fight!"

"It looks that way."

"I haf but one gun!"

"I'll get a spanner from the launch," Todd declared.

Stauss shrugged.

"I can do nothing with you, mynheer. Stay then, and if this night brings success I will double the pay that I promised you."

"I want no pay for it!" Todd retorted shortly. "Are you going to kill this man you are after?"

Stauss hesitated a long moment.

"No," he said finally. "I haf often thought I would shoot him like a dog. But I am no murderer, mynheer. My boy's life iss gone! All I ask iss atonement for it! The law will do that! If I catch this man trying to rob this boat, there will be no doubt that he will hang for the other! No further proof will be needed!" He fell silent, stroking his short beard slowly.

Little more was said after that. Stauss posted one of the Malay sailors in the bow, one in the stern, and another amidships. He ordered them to keep a close watch in the direction of the shore, and to report any suspicious noises, however slight.

The wind was offshore. The *Spreewald* lay almost bow-on to the land. Todd hauled the launch alongside, dropped into it, and took a medium-sized spanner wrench from the tool locker. Back on deck once more, he hefted it appraisingly. Short of a pistol, it could not be better for the task ahead. It was fully as deadly, if not more so, than the knives of the Malays. He took his position in the bow. Stauss, armed with a thirty-two pistol, elected to patrol the deck silently. Thus they began the night.

The slow minutes dragged into hours. Silence mantled the *Spreewald,* broken only by the slosh of water against her hull, or the shifting of a bit of gear in the evening breeze. Stauss came and went, a silent shadow.

Out over the water they could see the twinkling lights of Pearl Town. There, a short half mile away, two-score thousand people were living a hectic, feverish existence. The *Spreewald,* dark, save for her riding lights, might as well have been a thousand miles away. Silently she rode at the end of her anchor chain—waiting.

The thin moon finally edged above the horizon, but a thick drift of clouds muffled the feeble rays to nothing. Todd finally grew tired of standing in the bow and took a turn along the deck. It brought him by the companion. The door was open. He saw the light blot of a white dress at the bottom of the steps. There, waiting—it might be praying—was the fair-cheeked daughter of Stauss. Todd gripped the spanner tighter and his lips set more firmly as he walked back to the bow.

Midnight drew near. Todd began to grow sleepy. With fatigue came the thought that perhaps the whole thing was built upon nothing. There might be two men with scars on their chests!

Because the fierce looking Arab had been watching him, was no sign that the man intended to turn his hand to robbery and murder. Stauss had a just grievance, but Todd began to wonder if the man had not let his desire run riot with his imagination. The thought made him less watchful. He leaned on the rail and relaxed.

Todd must have dozed off slightly. He came to when the Malay shook his arm.

"You hear!" the man hissed in his ear. "You hear?"

Startled, Todd shook his head to clear it, and peered out over the water.

Nothing was visible in the darkness but the distant lights of Pearl Town.

Then as Todd listened it seemed that a slight sound became audible between the *Spreewald* and the shore.

He turned his head slightly and strained his hearing. This time there was no doubt. A muffled thump and splashing, such as might be made by one not very skillful with oars, came to his ears.

"You hear, tuan?" the Malay asked again under his breath.

"Yes! Where's Stauss?"

The man jerked his head toward the stern.

"I'll get him!" Gripping the steel wrench, Todd went swiftly and quietly back to the stern. Stauss was there. At the news, he tensed, thrust his hand into his rear trouser's pocket, and brought forth his automatic. Holding it, he listened, his head cocked to one side.

"I hear nothing!" he husked after a moment.

"Come in the bow and you will!" Todd assured him.

They went forward. There Stauss heard the noise. Steadily it stole over the water, and as the minutes passed, grew plainer, until there was no longer doubt that a boat was being rowed toward the *Spreewald*.

"It iss them!" Stauss grated huskily.

"Looks like it," Todd admitted.

"Tell the other two men to come up here!"

Todd slipped back and sent the Malays forward. He followed. The five of them listened to the muffled approach of the unknown boat.

"Let them come over the rail!" Stauss ordered curtly. "Do nothing until I speak! Then we will capture them! You understand? Wait until I give you a signal."

"Yes, tuan!" the Malay nearest him answered.

"Do you want help to catch your man?" Todd queried.

"I will need no help!" His huge left fist came up before him, clenched.

They waited, tense, expectant.

The drifting clouds thickened over the moon. All vision blurred into nothing. The shore lights winked steadily, little pin points of life in the dark night. The *Spreewald* tugged gently at her anchor chain, a dark ghost, marked out from the night by her riding lights.

THE noise of the approaching boat gradually became plainer. The ones in it seemed not to care whether they were heard or not.

Without warning there was a sneeze out in the darkness. The oars quieted a moment, then again took up their rythmic stroking.

Todd's lips became dry. His heart beat faster. He gripped the handle of the spanner with undue tightness. He breathed deeply, tried to relax. It was not easy with the menace creeping on through the darkness.

A bit of native song suddenly burst forth from the approaching boat.

The men on the *Spreewald* listened with amazement.

"What's the idea?" Todd whispered.

Stauss swore under his breath.

"They try to cover up!" he rasped.

"Perhaps it's not the ones you expect."

"Yes! No one else will be out here at this time of night. They try to make us think they mean nothing!"

The song grew louder. They stopped abruptly. A man's voice spoke loudly.

"Make no noise!" Stauss warned.

Debate broke out between two men in the boat. They spoke in crackling Arabic that was not understandable.

All the time the boat was being rowed nearer. A moment came when the voices sounded almost even with the bow of the *Spreewald*, and a few feet out. Todd strained his eyes, fancied he saw a darker mass on the surface of the water.

There, an altercation began between the two men who had been talking. Their voices grew louder, grew sharper. It quickly developed into a full-fledged quarrel that was fierce as it was loud.

While Stauss, Todd and the three Malays listened in amazement, the two men in the boat talked faster, louder until they were shouting at each other. There was such menace in their tones that Todd looked for one to collapse moaning with a knife in his body at any moment.

"What iss?" Stauss growled.

Todd had no answer to make. The thing was too surprising.

Out of the blackness that shrouded the rear deck of the *Spreewald* came a muffled cry.

Todd and Stauss both heard it, indistinct through the disturbance that was going on off-side.

Stauss turned his head.

"You hear?" he demanded.

"Yes!"

Doubtfully Stauss said, "It sounded like Hildegarde!"

"And like she was in trouble!"

Stauss stepped away from the rail.

"I will see!" he snapped. "Watch here!"

Todd would have liked to have gone also. Hint of danger to Hildegarde sent the blood leaping through his veins. Only the knowledge that Stauss was well able to do anything necessary, and that he was needed there at the rail, kept him in the bow.

The quarreling in the boat continued unabated.

Gripping the spanner, Todd stood by the rail, half his mind out there in the darkness, half on Hildegarde Stauss.

Without warning a roar of wrath came from Stauss. An orange stream of fire streaked the night as his pistol went off. There was a cry from another throat. Then silence.

Startled, Todd and the Malays peered back through the darkness.

"Come on!" Todd rasped, and stepped forward.

The Malays hung back. They had no personal interest in the affair. Their nerves had been shaken by the stealthy approach of the unknown boat. This last demoralized them.

There was no time to argue. Gripping the spanner tightly, Todd went back through the darkness.

Off-side the loud argument continued, covering any minor sounds on the deck of the *Spreewald*. The quiet here was intense.

Todd tried to pierce the night and see what was at the companion. He could not. No sounds came to his ears. After the one shot, the double cry, the deck seemed to be deserted.

Abruptly the illusion ended. His outstretched left hand pushed into body. A sharp bit of Arabic snapped out at him.

He swung the spanner without a word. It thudded into the soft flesh of a shoulder. A cry of pain burst out. The unknown fell back.

Voices spoke. Feet slithered on the deck planks.

Todd stopped low and rushed. Bodies met him. There was a grunt as his left fist sank into a stomach, a second howl of pain as the spanner smashed into some part of another body.

The night worked in his favor. Nothing was visible. The men he was fighting could not see him, or tell him from one of their number. Everyone was his enemy. The knowledge that there was none but him to aid the helpless girl below lent fury to his attack. Striking with fist and steel wrench he cleared the space in front.

Cries of pain broke out. Scraps of excited speech spluttered. Todd sprang at the nearest sound recklessly. His left hand felt cloth. He jerked it to him, swung the spanner.

Again he missed the head. Flesh and chest bone crunched under the savage blow. Strangling, the man fell away from him. Todd lunged after and almost tripped flat over a pair of legs on the deck.

He went down on one knee.

Back of him someone lighted a match.

In the brief second it flared Todd located himself. He was kneeling by the companion. The legs he had tripped over belonged to Stauss. The big Hollander lay on his side where he had been struck down as he started to go below.

As the match winked out Todd lunged to the right. A hot pain seared his left shoulder. The move had barely saved him from a stab between the shoulder blades.

Feet rushed to the spot where he had been.

In that moment Todd saw clearly that he stood little chance of winning out against the crowd that had boarded the boat. How many were there he did not know. Enough, however, to get him finally. Then they would have full possession of the *Spreewald* and Hildegarde. He went cold at the thought.

There were two courses open. To slip over the side into the water and trust to the night to hide him—or to get below and lock the companion. They would probably leave in that case.

All that flitted through his brain in a split second and in a split second Todd decided. He would stay with the *Spreewald* and Hildegarde Stauss.

By then he was on his feet, clear of the melee. He took several light steps to the stern and stamped loudly on the deck. Then dodged silently over against the port rail and moved up toward the companion again.

The ruse worked. The noise drew them to the stern. Todd, flattened against the port rail, escaped the rush.

Two steps took him to the companion. There he thought of Stauss. The man might not be dead. If left out with the infuriated Arabs he would surely die!

Todd acted without hesitation. Stooping, he laid the wrench on the deck and caught blindly at Stauss's body. He heaved desperately, lifted the inert form and dumped it into the companion. It tumbled down the steep stairs and landed at the bottom with a dull thud.

The few seconds' delay destroyed his margin of time. A second match hissed out a yard away. The holder saw him and leaped.

Todd had no time to find the spanner. He dove low, tackled, hurled the man to the deck. Scrambling back on hands and knees, he found the companion and half fell in, bumping his head on the side as he did so.

Clear to the bottom he dropped and trod the limp form of Stauss. Heedless, he stood up dizzily, mounted a step, and groped for the companion door. He found it, slammed it shut, and shot the catch. For the moment he was safe.

PANTING, Todd stepped down astraddle of Stauss. He was in the after stateroom where he and Stauss slept. The place was black, but he remembered that there was a box of matches under the pillow of his berth, the port one. He stepped over, felt under the pillow, found the matches, and struck a light.

Stauss was crumpled in a pile at the bottom of the stairs, his arms and legs sprawling grotesquely. Todd went to his side, marked his position, blew the match out, and stooped.

With an effort he raised the big Hollander, dragged him to the starboard berth and lifted him in it. Feeling in the darkness, he ripped the shirt open and thrust his hand over the heart.

It was still beating.

That fact cheered Todd immensely. He had been dreading the thought that Stauss was dead.

Overhead voices spoke rapidly. Someone sought to open the companion door. It held shut. The excited speech increased. It was tried again.

Todd had left his spanner on deck. Stauss's pistol was there also. He had nothing with which to meet an attack.

The stateroom was barren of anything that would serve. The galley might have something, a poker, a knife, perhaps a cleaver. A door in the forward end of the cabin opened into the saloon. From the saloon a door opened into the galley. Todd went to the saloon door, turned the knob, and pulled. The door was locked.

He rapped.

There was no sound.

"Miss Stauss!" he called, sudden fear growing upon him.

No voice answered him.

He knocked again, called: "It's me—Todd!"

A moment later the key grated in the lock. The door opened.

The saloon was dark also, but he knew that Hildegarde was standing there before him.

"Are you all right!" he burst out.

"Yes!" she answered evenly, but with an undercurrent of strain. "What—what has happened?"

"They surprised us!"

"Father—is he . . . ?"

"He is alive! Have you got anything in the galley that I can use for a weapon? A cleaver?"

"No cleaver! I have a large butcher knife!"

"Let me have it! I haven't a thing to fight with if they come down here!"

Without a word she ran forward to the galley.

In the doorway Todd stood, listening to

the sounds on deck. Feet were moving about, voices were speaking—but the attempts to open the companion door had ceased. His spirits rose a bit. It might be that the thieves had decided to give up the thing and leave.

Hildegarde returned in a moment, said: "Here is the knife! Where is your hand?"

"Here!" Todd held his right hand out. He felt her groping hand touch his wrist, then clasp his fingers. Soft, warm, the contact sent his pulses leaping again. The knife handle was pressed into his fingers and she released them.

"I did not want to cut you in the darkness," she explained.

Todd hefted the knife, ran his fingers down the blade. It was large, sharp. With it he could do fearful execution if the need arose. On the spot he resolved to fight until the last bit of consciousness left him. Never would he leave this girl to the doubtful mercies of the band of cutthroats on deck! A thought made him ask:

"Is the saloon skylight fastened?"

"Yes!"

"Good! They may try to get down that way!"

"Father! Where is he?"

"In his bunk!"

"What is the matter with him?"

"I don't know. He is alive!"

"Is he hurt bad?"

"I don't think so!"

"Light a lamp! I must see him!"

"It won't be wise!" Todd objected. "I don't think they know you are on board! If they found it out—it might make a difference."

"I don't care! I want to see him!" Her voice was taut with emotion.

Todd could see that she was laboring under the dread that Stauss was dying. He compromised.

"I'll hold a lighted match over him. It will give you time to see what is the matter."

"Quick!"

"Come."

Todd went to Stauss's berth and took the box of matches from his pocket. She followed and leaned over the body of her father.

"Here goes!" Todd struck a match. By the flickering yellow flame they both peered down at Stauss.

He lay inert, just as Todd had placed him, right arm across his chest, left by his side. His face was unmarked.

Hildegarde saw the open shirt, thrust her hand in. After a moment she drew breath with a little gasp of relief.

"He is living!" she exclaimed in a low tone.

"Certainly! He will be all right!"

"What is the matter with him?"

The match was burning low. Todd tossed it to the floor and lit another. "I don't know," he admitted. "Let's see if he's bleeding anywhere."

They found no sign of dark blood on Stauss's white drill suit. Todd rolled him part way over and made sure there was no blood on the back.

"He hasn't been cut," he said with conviction. "There would be some blood if he was."

"Then what is the matter with him?"

"Knocked out probably. Let's see if there are any marks about his head."

He lit another match. They both bent and looked closely at Stauss's head. There was no blood there either. Todd ran his fingers over the scalp. On the right side he found a swelling. The scalp was not broken. It told its own story.

"Sand bag," Todd said briefly. "He walked right into the midst of them. He fired once—then one of them slugged him with a sandbag."

"Will—will he be all right?"

"Yes, indeed!"

She drew a shuddering breath of relief.

"I—I'm so glad! I couldn't bear it to lose him!"

"You won't!"

Then, just as the match went out, she caught sight of Todd's shoulder. "What is the matter with your shoulder?" she asked sharply.

Todd had not given it much thought. He was aware that a knife had slashed him, that his shirt was wet with blood. Now he realized the shoulder was sore and hurt every time he moved the arm. But he tried to make light of it.

"Nothing! Just a little scratch one of them gave me!"

"I saw much blood!"

"It doesn't amount to a thing!"

"Light a match!"

"Forget it," Todd said lightly.

"Light a match!" she insisted.

Todd yielded, scratched another match

into flame. The left shoulder of his coat was wet with blood. There was a rent in the cloth where the knife blade had slashed through.

She caught her breath at the sight.

"See! It is bleeding badly! Let me bandage it!"

"Not now! There isn't time! They might break the companion door any minute!"

"We can do nothing until then! I can be fixing it!"

There was logic in her words. Todd agreed, saying only, "Let me make certain they are not trying to get in through the galley hatch."

HE WENT forward into the galley and listened. Steps were audible on the deck overhead, but no one seemed to be giving the hatch any attention. Nor the saloon skylight either. It puzzled him. The men on deck seemed to be busy—yet they were not trying to get down below. What were they doing?

He could not guess and after a moment went back into the saloon and took off his coat. The wound was not deep, had almost stopped bleeding. There was no time to do much to it. Hildegarde found a sheet and tore it in strips. Aided by several lighted matches, she managed to get a bandage of sorts around the wound, enough to protect it somewhat.

While she worked they talked.

"You screamed. What was the matter?" Todd asked.

"I was sitting on father's berth, half asleep. A man came down the stairs. I spoke, thinking it was you or father. He did not answer—and came on. It made me think something was wrong. I got up and started to come into the saloon. He lighted a match, saw me, and tried to seize me. He was a native.

"I screamed—and ran into the saloon and locked the door behind. He tried to get in. I heard father shout. His pistol went off. The man ran back on deck. I closed the saloon skylight and waited. It was not pleasant," she finished simply.

"No," Todd agreed soberly. "I should think not!"

"What happened?"

Todd told her of the boat, the quarreling men. "It must have been a ruse to attract attention, while another lot of men slipped over the stern," he said. "If you had not screamed then they would probably have cornered us in the bow and finished us!"

"The Malay sailors?"

"I don't know!" Todd said bitterly. "And I don't care! They were too frightened to help!"

She finished tying the bandage. They stood for a moment, silent.

"Thank you," Todd said awkwardly.

She answered, low, "You are welcome."

Simple words, but that moment went to Todd's head like wine. It took an effort to turn his thoughts into another channel. A burst of renewed activity on deck helped him.

"What are they doing?" he muttered in perplexity.

She answered: "It sounds like they are hauling up the anchor."

The sound of anchor chain became distinctly audible. A voice on deck rasped orders.

Todd exclaimed sharply: "They are setting sail!"

They could hear the foresail, then the mainsail running up. A voice that seemed to be commanding, spit and snarled orders. Canvas slatted as the offshore breeze caught it. The *Spreewald* heeled over. Underfoot the water began to gurgle past.

"What now?" Hildegarde asked anxiously. "Can't we do something?"

"Not a thing!" Todd answered gloomily, "except stay down here and try to keep them out."

"When daylight comes they will leave, won't they?"

"I doubt it! Looks like they are taking the *Spreewald* out where they won't be disturbed. If that's the case—they've got us!"

She did not receive the news with tears, or any visible signs of faltering. Her voice, when she spoke, was passionate, but collected.

"I would give them the pearls, if I knew where they were."

Thinking of her and what the future might hold if she fell into the hands of the men on deck, Todd exclaimed: "So would I! Where are they?"

"I don't know! Father has different hiding places around the boat. There is one secret panel in his cabin. They might be there."

"Look, will you?"

"Yes. Let me have the matches."

Todd gave them to her, and remained in the saloon while she went into the next room. She lit one match, searched somewhere a moment, and then came back to the doorway.

"They are not there," she stated.

"Perhaps they are still in his pocket."

"I'll see." She searched her father's pockets, with no better results. "When he came down to play solitaire, he hid them," she said. "I don't think we can find them."

"They probably wouldn't do any good anyway. These men have gone too far to let us escape, if they can help it."

They both fell silent. The noises on deck had quieted a trifle. The *Spreewald* was running smartly before the wind. Todd mentally pictured the lights of Pearl Town fading behind. They would grow fainter, finally drop over the horizon. The *Spreewald* would be alone in a vast darkness, with no law and no help to stay the hands of the desperadoes who had captured her. Then . . . ! Todd shuddered inwardly at the thought.

There was a sudden crash overhead. A section of the saloon skylight glass crashed to the floor. Todd jumped to one side and faced the spot, ready for what was to come.

A voice using fair English, spoke through the opening that had been made.

"Give us the pearls and the boat will be turned back!"

Todd made no reply.

After a moment the voice declared. "We want but the pearls! Deliver them and you will go free!"

"I have no pearls!" Todd said and stepped to one side lest they shoot at the sound of his voice.

"Allah knows better!" the voice said piously.

"I have no pearls!" Todd repeated again. "I gave them to another!"

A rapid exchange of Arabic broke forth up on the deck. After a moment the voice spoke again, "The pearls were brought on board! No man has left!"

Todd made no answer.

The voice spoke impatiently, "A last offer! Give us the pearls!"

Again Todd made no reply.

Again the rush of Arabic. The men moved away from the skylight.

Hildegarde slipped across the saloon to the galley door. A moment she fumbled about, then returned. Todd asked, "What's the matter?"

Coolly she answered, "I went for the poker."

In spite of their trouble, Todd felt a glow of pride. No cowardice there! If Hildegarde was afraid she masked the fact well! He contrasted it with the fear she had shown for her father's safety, early in the evening. Then she wanted to prevent. Now that it was too late she was ready to meet the worst, fearlessly! A girl in ten thousand, Todd thought as he stood in the blank darkness of the cramped saloon and waited for the attack that he was certain was coming.

NOT long did he wait. There was another crash on the companion door. Others followed in quick succession. The door splintered and fell in.

Todd ran to the bottom of the stairs. He sensed, rather than heard, Hildegarde follow him.

"Go back!" he husked. "I'll meet them!"

Standing on the other side of the stairs, she answered him, calmly: "I will strike the second man!"

There was no time to talk further.

A lantern was thrust through the broken door. Todd shifted back of the steps, where the peering eyes could not see him. Hildegarde did the same. Tense, they waited.

The light was pulled back.

Suddenly a ball of flying sparks arched through the darkness and fell to the floor. A flood of acrid smoke rose from it.

Todd recognized the smell of burning rope. He sprang to the spot and tried to stamp the sparks out. The rope had been shredded and it was tarred. In spite of his frantic efforts it continued to smolder.

A second bundle was thrown down. It struck his side, cascaded sparks down his legs, and fell at his feet. The heavy smoke enveloped him, brought tears to his eyes.

Hildegarde joined him and helped stamp the smoldering stuff.

Todd closed the saloon door, that they might have a smoke free place to retreat to.

A third ball of smoldering rope yarn was tossed down.

By that time the little cabin was full of biting, acrid fumes. It set them coughing and blinded their eyes with tears. The tarred rope was almost impossible to put out.

Todd saw that they would not be able to stand it.

"Into the saloon!" he gasped.

"Father! Bring him!"

"Open the door!"

Todd bent over Stauss to lift him.

Her voice rose loud through a burst of coughing, "The saloon is full of smoke!"

Todd let Stauss fall back and darted to the door. Through streaming eyes he saw several heaps of sparks on the saloon floor.

"Kneel down! Put your head close to the floor!" he ordered. "The air will be better there!"

Todd knelt. Hildegarde's arm brushed his as she did the same.

The air was a little better near the floor. They gulped it thankfully.

While they knelt, the light was thrust into the companion again. As Todd jumped up, a dark form sprang down the steep steps. A second one followed after.

The first form crashed into Todd before he was upright. He swayed back and struck the bulkhead with the back of his head.

The impact dazed Todd. He staggered, half out on his feet. Hands seized him. Weakly he tried to resist. He was aware of confused scuffling. The man who held him cried out in pain. Something struck the top of his head heavily. The world went dark. He slid to the floor.

Todd came to in the saloon. It was lighted. The air was fresh, although a taint of smoke still hung about. He was on the port seat, hands bound behind, feet free. His head ached. Dizzily he sat up, blinked and peered around.

Two swarthy Arabs, clad in dark burnooses, were in the saloon. The one nearest Todd was tall and powerful, with a flat nose and thick, cruel looking lips. A kinky black beard covered his chin and cheeks and on his left cheek there was an open wound, from which the blood seeped down into the black hairs of his beard. He was scowling and when Todd sat up the scowl deepened.

Todd looked past the big Arab.

On the other side of the saloon Hildegarde sat, her hands also bound behind her. Her face was white and strained. Their eyes met.

"Cheerio!" Todd said with an effort.

She nodded, swallowed, and contrived the ghost of a smile.

There was no time to say more. The big Arab took a step nearer Todd. "The pearls!" he rasped.

Todd shook his head.

"I have no pearls!" he declared flatly.

"I, myself, saw you find them!"

"I gave them away!"

The Arab's face showed plainly that he took no stock in that statement. His right hand held Stauss's pistol. He laid the pistol on the table by the cabin door, reached under his burnoose and brought forth a thin-bladed, razor-edged dagger.

"Allah is great!" he exclaimed piously, waving the knife. "There is no God but Allah—and by Allah I will drive this knife into your flesh if you do not tell me the truth!"

Todd looked at the sharp knife. The blood left his face. But again he insisted: "I have not lied! I gave the pearls to the captain! Where they are now I know not!"

The Arab sitting beside Hildegarde spoke. "What man is the captain?"

Todd jerked his head toward the cabin door.

"He is in there," he said shortly.

The big Arab showed stained teeth through his black beard.

"I have seen this captain of yours before!" he spit out. "There is a matter to be settled between us!"

"He is dying!"

The Arab shook his head, ran his left hand through his short tangled beard and stated: "He will walk before sunrise!" He held the knife out before him and gave it a slow thrust and twist. "Then," he finished, "I will deal with him!"

Hildegarde spoke clearly and scornfully, "You faced him once! Have you the courage to do it again?"

The man whirled and glared at her, lips drawn back over his teeth.

"I fear no man!" he cried. "He shall die by my own hand! I swear it by the sacred hairs of the Prophet's Beard!"

Todd tried to bluff. "You can't get away with this! It's piracy! You'll all hang if you don't turn back and get off the boat!"

The other shrugged.

"There will be none to carry the story!

You have seen us! Now you die!"

The Arab sitting by Hildegarde smiled wolfishly and stared at her with anticipation. Todd saw and sickened inside.

Hildegarde held her head high and looked at the big Arab scornfully.

"Had there been light, you would have died—by the hand of a woman!" she exclaimed.

The man put his fingers to the cut on his cheek, and then looked at the blood on their tips. His brows drew down. "We will see what manner of woman you are, before you die!" he snarled. His eyes ran over her.

Sick, despairing, Todd racked his head for some hope of escape but found none. Stauss was unconscious in the next room; they were bound. Death was inevitable! He did not fear it greatly, but his soul quailed at the horror which awaited the flaxen-haired girl across from him. In that moment, he would have welcomed death, had it brought assurance that she would be spared.

THEIR eyes met across the width of the small saloon. Some of his suffering must have been written on his face. Pale though she was, her gaze softened and she tried to smile again. "Cheerio!" she said with an effort.

It was too much. Todd broke. "My dear!" he said huskily. "My dear!"

Her eyes closed. She swallowed a sudden lump that came into her throat. And in that moment the big Arab turned on Todd.

"The pearls!" he snarled, raising the knife.

"I gave them to the captain," Todd said through dry lips.

The man came nearer. Deliberately he pushed the knife forward until the sharp point was at Todd's shoulder.

"The pearls!" he rasped.

Numbly Todd shook his head.

Slowly the Arab pushed the dagger forward. The keen point went through the shirt and entered the living flesh a full half inch.

Todd clenched his jaws and looked past the Arab rigidly.

A moment the knife remained. The man gave it a twist and drew it back. A spot of red welled out on the shirt.

The second Arab looked on with keen enjoyment. Hildegarde closed her eyes.

"Speak!" the one with the knife commanded harshly.

Todd shook his head.

A second time the knife pushed forward and entered the flesh of the shoulder. The pain was great. Todd locked it in his breast and concentrated his gaze on the knob of the cabin door.

Again the knife twisted and was withdrawn.

"The pearls!"

Todd did not bother to shake his head again. He stared at the knob, trying to think of nothing but that one spot.

He felt the sharp dagger enter his shoulder at still a third point. And as the pain darted through him, and he clenched his jaw and tried to concentrate on the small door knob, it turned slightly. The door swayed open a trifle.

Todd thought his eyes had played a trick on him. He blinked, looked again. There was no mistake! The door was open almost a half inch. At the height of a tall man's head from the floor an eye was peering through. Just under the eye he caught a glimpse of the tawny hairs of a short beard.

Sheer amazement gripped Todd. The pain in his shoulder faded as his brain wrestled with this new development. Stauss had been on his berth unconscious! Now Stauss was peering through the door!

Todd tore his gaze away, lest he betray Stauss. Both Arabs were watching him, their backs to the door. Hildegarde had her eyes closed.

The dagger was withdrawn the third time. Vaguely Todd was aware that his shoulder was wet with blood.

The one who was torturing him, cried angrily, "The pearls, pig!"

Todd paid him no attention. His thoughts were whirling. Stauss was on his feet! They didn't know it! If Stauss was only armed!

Thought of the pistol on the table flashed into his head. Stauss could reach it with one quick grab. But it might not be loaded! Casting aside all caution, Todd raised his eyes to the brutal-faced man before him. With apparent fear, he burst out:

"Don't cut me! Shoot me and end it! There is a pistol on that table by the door! Is it loaded?"

The Arab grinned with enjoyment.

"It is loaded," he admitted. "But it is not for you! The pearls—or the knife!"

"The gun!" Todd cried loudly. "The gun on the table by the door! Get it and use it!"

The two Arabs watched him, laughing. Hildegarde's face was the color of chalk. Her lips moved silently.

Todd dared not look at the door. Staring up into the swarthy face before him, he begged, "The pistol is loaded! Get it!"

His last words covered any slight noise the opening door might have made. A tall burly figure lunged through and snatched the loaded gun from the table. Stauss's bellow filled the room.

"Now! I haf you!"

The tall Arab whirled; the other jumped to his feet, a knife flashing in his hand. They rushed at Stauss.

Hildegarde opened her eyes at the sound of her father's voice. As the smaller Arab passed in front of her, she thrust out her unbound legs and tripped him. The man crashed to the floor.

Stauss's pistol roared deafeningly. The big Arab's rush carried him on, but his dagger clattered to the floor harmlessly. He crumpled to a huddled heap as he reached Stauss. The second Arab sprang up. Stauss struck savagely with the barrel of the pistol. The man collapsed on his face.

Stauss snatched the dagger from the floor, leaped over the two fallen men and slashed the cords from the wrists of his daughter and Todd.

"Here!" he cried, thrusting the dagger into Todd's fingers. "On deck!" He whirled and rushed into the cabin. Todd followed.

Not twenty seconds elapsed from the shot to the moment Stauss burst through the companion and trod the open deck of the *Spreewald*. The clouds had thinned a trifle; the moon was higher. There was enough light to see dimly.

A dark shadow left the wheel and ran forward. Stauss shot it down ruthlessly. No others were in the stern. As Todd leaped through the companion Stauss turned and roared triumphantly:

"Up forward! We haf them!"

Side by side they ran toward the bow.

One figure they passed, lying on the deck. Stauss gave it a kick with his foot. It groaned, and moved in deep pain.

"The one I shot before!" Stauss rumbled. "He will keep!"

Todd's left shoulder, slashed behind, wounded in front, was almost useless. But he clutched the dagger in his right hand and kept at Stauss's side.

Forward of the foremast they saw three figures retreating into the bow. Stauss raised the pistol.

A voice cried, "Mercy, sahib!"

"Mercy iss it!" Stauss bellowed furiously. "Down on your faces!"

They dropped flat on the deck.

"Where are my sailors?" Stauss demanded.

The crew's hatch was right behind them. It lifted a trifle and a voice spoke wanly: "Here, tuan."

"Come up!" Stauss shouted.

The hatch lifted a trifle further.

"Quick!" Stauss barked.

The hatch opened full. The three Malay sailors crawled forth. "Take the wheel!" Stauss ordered the nearest one. To the three men stretched on deck, he rumbled, "Get down below!"

In silence they got to their feet. One groaned as he went below. Todd saw that he held his chest with his right hand and knew it was one of the men he had struck with the spanner.

Stauss closed the hatch and ordered the two Malay sailors to batten it down securely. Then he turned to Todd.

"That iss ended!" he commented grimly.

"Yes," Todd agreed, drawing a deep breath. "We—live!"

"Come," Stauss said. "In the saloon iss a mess! First we fix that, then talk of living!"

They went below.

IN THE saloon the faint smell of powder smoke wiped out the odor of burning rope. Hildegarde was standing at the forward end, her eyes rigidly fixed on the two silent figures on the floor. In her right hand was the dagger which had fallen from the hand of the second Arab.

As her father entered the saloon she looked up.

Stauss crossed over.

"It iss all over," he said reassuringly.

Her eyes filled with tears. Her lips quivered. The dagger suddenly dropped from her fingers to the floor. She threw herself violently into her father's arms.

"I don't want to cry!" she sobbed fiercely. "I d-don't want to cry!"

Stauss held her and stroked her hair and said awkwardly, "There iss no more to worry about! Now we can be happy! Smile for me!"

Her sobs quickly slackened. She was silent a moment, resting against her father's broad chest. Then she produced a small handkerchief, dabbed at her eyes, and smiled weakly.

"Now I feel better," she stated. "Tell me what happened. Where did you come from?"

"In my berth," Stauss declared, "I came to. My head was hurting. It was dark. I heard voices in here. I went to the door and opened it a little. Todd saw me and let me know where my gun was. The rest you know."

She nodded silently.

Todd had stopped in the doorway of the saloon. Stauss stepped aside. She saw him. "Your shoulder!" she exclaimed quickly. "Come, I will fix it!"

"Don't bother."

She paid no attention to the remark, turned to the galley door, saying, "I will get water."

Stauss chuckled.

"She will fix it!" he said. "Better you give in quickly, mynheer! My Hildegarde has a way with her!"

Todd grinned and came forward into the room.

Stauss stepped over the two figures on the floor. He rolled the big Arab over and examined him.

"Dead!" he commented briefly. "All iss over!" The other Arab had a broken spot on his skull, but he still lived. "I will take them both on deck!" Stauss decided, straightening up. "We will carry them all, living and dead, back to Pearl Town and give them to the police."

"I'll help you."

Stauss shook his head.

"You haf but one arm!" he objected. "For me it iss nothing!" He stooped, picked the big Arab up, and strode out of the room with him.

While Todd waited indecisively, Hildegarde came from the galley with several clean towels and a pan of water. She threw up the lid of her father's roll top desk and set the pan down.

"Take your shirt off," she requested.

"You shouldn't take all this bother."

Her brows contracted in mock displeasure.

"Remove your shirt!" she ordered bruskly.

Todd sighed with resignation. "If you put it that way," he said meekly.

At that moment Stauss came back. When he saw the towels and the pan of water he chuckled again.

"So? I tell you it iss better you give in, mynheer!" he rumbled through his beard. "My Hildegarde has a way with her!" He stooped, picked up the unconscious Arab and went out again.

Hildegarde went to work on the wounded shoulder.

Her fingers were deft. She removed the makeshift bandage, washed the cuts, got antiseptic and sterilized them. Then she put a fresh, neat bandage in place.

Neither spoke a word. Todd stood motionless, his eyes following her movement.

With a needle and thread she sewed the last length of bandage in place. Expertly she broke the thread, gave the shoulder a pat, and stepped back.

"There," she commented. "That is all."

Their eyes met. A sudden silence fell over the saloon. Todd's heart began to race.

"Is it—all?" he demanded.

A slight flush stole into the tan of her cheeks. No word crossed her lips. Their eyes still clung.

Todd put forth his right hand and captured one of hers. It was soft, warm, and lay in his unresistingly.

"My dear," Todd said huskily, "I am afraid I love you!"

A sudden wisp of smile touched her lips.

"I," she answered slowly, "am not afraid—for I love too."

Todd released her hand abruptly and gathered her to him.

"Then," he exclaimed, "I am afraid no more!"

Through the broken skylight over their heads a sudden bellow filled the room.

"So? I tell you it iss better you give in quickly!" Stauss shouted down. "My Hildegarde has a way with her!"

Another Racy Tale of Show Folks

LOVE WILL FIND A JAY

By THOMAS THURSDAY

TO BEGIN with, boys and girls, if this contribution to the classics should happen to wind up like the usual load of love, romance, and assorted hooey I hope I get crowned with a brick. Honest to Lindbergh, I'm the bit fed up on the sappy endings via fiction and the movies, all of which gives me a pain. So, customers, if it's all the same to you, this appetizing romance is headed for a neat sock in the pan—and how!

If you don't remember me, as Rip Van Winkle remarked to the merry villagers, I'm Doc McKeezick, manager of the side-show with Ike Sullivans' *Wild West Rodeo and Freak Hippodrome*. Speaking of Barnum—now in Heaven—that was a tasty tribe of troupers, I'll tell whoever's listening!

It was while we was showing through Gods' Own Country—fiction for the West—that Omar Gimpey shuffled into view. At the time this sequel to *Vanity Fair* opens I had among my freak exhibit one of the newest novelties playing under canvas, to wit and i. e., Beatrice Baxter, Builder of Successful Men and Women. Get a load of that! Previous to framing her highbrow gaff, I was privy to the fact that Beatrice had spent plenty years in mis-fortune telling, down in the land of Coney Island. In the lingo of the white tops, she had been a plain mitt-reader, under the nom de blaah of Princess de Patrie, Worlds' Premier Mystic. I hadn't seen the lady for about four years, during which time many things can happen, as Jack Sharkey was heard to remark to Mons. Dempsey.

To make a clean bosom of matters, one thing happened to Beatrice that I didn't know about, and which she failed to broadcast to the panting world. But life being what it is—and maybe it isn't, hey?—anyway, some gals, like the heathen Chinese, are peculiar. However, to return to our kumquats, when Beatrice found that her mitt-reading grift was becoming so raw that even congressmen and wise New Yorkers gave it the laugh, she changed her racket to applied psychology, adding a few twists that Kid Freud and Professor Jack Dewey never heard of.

For a certain price, meaning all she could grab, Beatrice guaranteed to make over men and women in the image of success, by implanting confidence in all the lads and lassies who had no more back-bone than a yard of pancake syrup. In short, the remarkable lady professor wouldst even show the dumbbells how to ring loud and long midst the successful chimes of life. Naturally, this sort of paprika was a brand new gag for a side-show, and plenty out of place, but maybe Beatrice didn't goal 'em! Especially Mons. Omar Gimpey, of the sandy little slab of Gin Gulch, Arizona. Omar was between twenty-one and a rich dad and had everything but confidence, pep, and the sort of stuff that goes to make a good Kiwanian. The senior Gimpey had a dime for every New Jersey-born cowboy in the "Western" movies, and was one of the largest ranch owners in dear old Arizona.

Gin Gulch, our fifth stop of the season, was a close-knit burg containing hard men and soft money—if you used a blackjack—but we managed to get our share. Between Monday and Saturday, the kid-show took in *beaucoup* pennies—not counting tips. Which nobody got.

"I guess I'm good, hey?" remarks "Cock-Eye" Egan, my ballyhoo talker. "Maybe I'm not shooing 'em in! A coupla nice words from me, and the customers collapse over the box-offices. Speaking of sugar, Doc, I think it's time for me to tap Old Man Sullivan for a raise in loot."

"Tap your head," I says politely, "and you will hear a echo. Your brain is for rent. Personally, I think we would do much more business if you kept your food chute shut. You ain't no Bryan, what I mean! Besides, ain't you already robbing the Old Man of fifty berries per weekly?"

"What," yelps Cock-Eye, "is fifty smackers to a guy like me?"

"About the same as the Battle of Waterloo to Napoleon," I says. "In different words, plenty."

"The mere trifle—just peanut and pop-corn jack," he whinnies. "*I* crave to eat tasty and often, and—listen: if I don't get a boost in pennies soon, you ape, you can hire a new boy. What d'yer think of them berries?"

Considering the shape of his head, what would you? Meanwhile, let's reduce the sauce from the apple, and come to the love part of a lovely love story, one that knocked me and Mons. Daniel J. Cupid for a set of diamond-studded flivver springs. (Don't run away, Old Subscriber—this ain't gonna be one of them kiss-in-the-end and live-happy-ever-after slices of romantical goo. Stick around, and see for yourself.)

BRIGHT and early next day—the day was bright and I was early—I'm reposing on the bally-stand, doing assorted nothing, when I notice a meek-appearing gil studying the painted banner of no less than Professor Beatrice Baxter. After squinting at it from all angles, including the middle, he shuffles up to me and blinks.

"Excuse me, mister," he begins, "but my name is Omar Gimpey, and I ain't got much pep and confidence—"

"I recommend McGoldbergs' Putrid Pills for Pale People," I says, with my usual good breeding.

"I reckon you don't understand me," be goes on. "I ain't sick that way. And I want to see Professor Baxter. The sign says that she can make over men and women in the image of success and confidence. Can I see her?"

"Why not?" I asks. "Just hang around a moment, Big Boy, whilst I go in and see if she's busy."

Figuring I might get a cut-in on the loot, I dash up to Beatrice and informs her that there's a live one without who wouldst like to come within.

"The lad looks ripe for picking, what I mean!" I says. "Of course, I-ah-naturally expect to get my share of the profits, seeing that I'm the guy who shilled him in."

"Mr. McKeezick," she gloops, "I'm afraid that I fail to gather your viewpoint. Since my profession is quite legitimate, it is not necessary for me to employ decoys. Please direct the young man to my studio, and then make an effort to attend to your own business."

"Don't try to high-hat me!" I steam up. "Remember, you and me speak the same langwidge!"

"Really?" she purrs. "Since when did *you* know the King's English?"

"Always," I snaps back. "He certainly ain't Irish, 'at's a cinch!"

Believing I had put over a masterpiece of wit and humor, I blew out, grab Omar Gimpey, and escort him into Beatrices' boob-trap.

Twenty minutes later, he comes out, with a flock of typewritten sheets under his left arm, holding on for sweet life.

"Well, how's things breaking?" I asks.

"Just fine," he replies. "Professor Baxter sure put a little pep in me. I'm gointa take all her lessons. This one here is the first, called *Brace Up—Wake Up—Buck Up!* Great, huh?"

"So was Alexander," I admits. "When are you supposed to call for another dose—er, I mean, when do you take your next lesson?"

"To-morrow. I take a lesson each day until I am all cured of my bashfulness and show signs of confidence. Well, s'long, mister."

Whilst Omar legged it down the midway I hops off the bally-stand and legs it in to see Beatrice.

"If I ain't speaking out of turn," I begins, "I think you got a chance of a lifetime. I have heard it rumored that Omar's pater is vile with important money, and is in a position to call Ford and Rockefeller 'Hank' and 'Jack.'"

"Oh, thank you so much!" she retorts, a pound of ice on every word. "But your information is of no value to me. I would not be interested if the young man was the Prince of Wales. The chief business of this place is business—and I think you'll find the exit directly behind you."

This gets me the wee trifle steamed up.

"Listen, lady," I says; "are you trying to give me a pushing around? Don't forget I knew of you when you was mitt-reading for the yokels on Surf Avenue, in the country of Coney Island. You should ought to be reasonable. I bring you in a live sap to pluck, and all the thanks I get is a haughty look. Madame, be your age!"

"Would you like to play a new game?" she enquires coyly. "That is, a new game for you?"

"What d'yer mean?" I asks. "What game?"

"The game of mind-your-own-business," she snaps. "That's the game of games, and one that you should learn as soon as possible. Now—er—do you think we'll have rain?"

"Nope; squalls!" I yelps, and dash out.

Her little game was just as plain to me as the Atlantic Ocean was to Kid Lindbergh. Although Beatrice was at least ten years older than the sluggish Omar, she still retained that school girl complexion, whilst her figger had more curves than the Lincoln Highway. Perhaps she couldn't win a Beauty Contest, or even pose as Miss Applesauce, but what a gal with her experience couldst do to a prize chump like Omar I leave to your imagination. And if she didn't intend to rib that young lad up for a quick dive into matrimony you can put me down as a slant-eyed gnu!

However, there's many a slip between the pup and pip—and so you can put me down as a slant-eyed gnu. I was as wrong as arsenic on a club sandwich, what I mean!

Well, to make a snippy story snippier, Omar comes in every afternoon for his daily supply of whiff-piff, i. e., confidence medicine, and as early as Saturday I notice he is beginning to be a changed lad. He walks with his head up, eyes fairly bright, whilst his jaw looks less like a weakling's. Even his lingo has taken on a brisk snappiness.

"Hello, Big Boy!" he greets me, just before entering for his Saturday lesson. "D'yer notice any change in me? Professor Baxter has sure helped me a lot. Honest, I begin to feel that I can whip Gene Tunney, and cross the Atlantic to Paris so fast that Lindbergh would gnash his teeth in rage. I'm getting plenty of pep and confidence, Mr. McKeezick!"

"Glad to hear it," I says. "Eh, what's she using on you—the needle?"

"Needle? Why, I never seen her sewing—but I bet she could, if she wanted to. Well, see you later."

A boob is a terrible bust, hey?

OUR next stand was played in a drum called Lariat Loop, forty miles away—as the Old Crow used to fly, before prohibition. Although this two-gun paradise was another whistle-stop slab, and billed for good business, another show had milked it rusty two weeks before our arrival, leaving us nothing but a load of cactus and a good supply of corral dust. In different words, business was terrible and money was as tight as an eel's skin.

"Well," I remarks to Beatrice, "I guess all we'll collect from this jovial joint is a week's vacation. But you should worry, huh? Last week's haul out of Omar Gimpey must of left you sitting pretty. Too bad you can't dig up another clown like him in every burgh, hey?"

Whilst Beatrice is curling her lip for a haughty come-back, we see a cloud of dust down the midway and, a moment later, a spiffy straight-eight roadster skids up and stops in front of the bally-stand. Before the dust half settles, Mons. Omar Gimpey leaps out, with a smile as broad as the word itself.

"Greetings!" he beams. "Hope I'm not late, Professor. Had to make a few mean detours, and got stuck in the mud in one place. Well, I'm already for Lesson Seven, if you are!"

Beatrice must of had that umpchay mesmerized, what?

Shortly after the professor and her gold-supply went into the tent, I gave orders to Cock-Eye Egan to spring the first ballyhoo. Although a goodly number of towners listened to Cock-eye's spiel, fully ninety per cent must of thought he was kidding and carelessly failed to buy tickets. Naturally, such ingratitude was a direct insult to the golden-voiced Mons. Egan, and he hopped off the bally-stand fit to be tied.

"What in sheol ails 'em saps?" he bellers. "I talked to 'em jakes like Bryan and Billy Sunday, and they give me the razzberry. Is this burgh in America?"

"Lay off the alibi act," I says. "If you ask me, your spiel had a cluck sound—the wee bit unconvincing, what I mean. Besides, you never was worth a damn when money was tight. You should ought to practise up a little, and turn out a better talk. A young baboon couldst do as good as you did."

Cock-Eye fails to thank me for my friendly opinion.

"Boloney!" he hoots, in a un-Chesterfieldian manner. "When better lectures are given, Mister Egan will give 'em. As the matter and facts, I ain't heard much better than m'self over the radio. Anyways, who in Hawaii are you to pass remarks?"

"That," I replies calmly, "is a mule with a different kick. Meanwhile, quit beefing, and get up on that stand and try again—in English."

"Are you hinting that I ain't got no education?" he yaps. "I admit that I been through everything but college, but I don't see any degrees tacked onto your ears. Cut out the sarcasm, Big Boy. I was talking on bally-stands whilst you was wearing diapers and spilling gruel over your bib. Besides, I worked on better shows than this wreck, don't think I ain't!"

With that off his vortex—or wherever the noise come from—he mounts the platform again, and delivers another spiel to a new assortment of six-day-sock-wearers. After raving for about ten minutes, he points to the ducat-boxes—and out of a possible four hundred, only ten buy tickets. All of which causes Cock-Eye to froth at the mouth. He yanks off his hat, slams it on the bally-stand, then proceeds to kick it into the pan of a innocent rube. After that little display of artistic temperament, he proceeds to pass some cryptic remarks hither and likewise yon.

"You yaps are all dead but too lazy to close your eyes!" he yelps. "I ain't seen your equal since I visited the tomb of my Uncle Mike! You should all be wedged under a slab, what I mean! Why, you ain't playing fair with the embalmer—"

"THAT'S out!" I yells, making a leap for the stand. "Just because these lads and lassies don't cotton to your quack line of chatter is no reason why you should ball 'em out. What d'yer use your head for—just to keep your ears apart? Folks," I goes on, turning to the audience, "I wish to apologize for the uncalled for remarks of this dizzy tramp. He don't know any better, I assure you, and if he was in his right place he wouldst be associating midst a family of baboons. It is the policy of this show—"

"Are you calling me names?" howls Cock-Eye, with a Dempsey scowl.

"Who did you think I was talking to—the grand-nephew of Captain Kidd? You may have been a riot high-pitching on street corners, selling cluck ointment to the yokels, but when it comes to talking on high class shows you're like Niagara Falls—all wet!"

"A coupla blaahs for you!" he snorts. "I was in show business whilst you was swiping marbles from the neighbors' kids!"

"Three or four blaahs for you," I retorts courteously. "Your spiel leaves your audience as cold as Mr. Zero's grandpop!"

"One more wise hoot out of you and I'll smack you down!" he bellers, his face as red as a crate of tomatoes. "As a manager, you're a total bankrupt. You ain't got brains enough to manage a hoopla joint, you—you big sap!"

"The last guy to call me a sap got a taste of embalming fluid," I replies, keeping down my fiery temper with the greatest of difficulty. "What's more, you flatfoot, you're fired!"

He tries to come back with a snappy rejoinder but chokes with fury, and I hope he succeeds. Hopping off the bally-stand, he selects a idle four-foot stake, swings it around a moment, then aims it at my innocent head. Whilst the death-dealing club was poised in mid air, Omar Gimpey comes out of the tent. After taking a speedy look at the gentlemanly tableau, Omar releases a torrid left hook to Cock-Eye's pelican-like beak. My playmate drops the stake like it was poison ivy, flops to the ground, and takes a complete course in astronomy.

"Fight fair, you guy!" snaps Omar. Then, noting that his sock was a success, he turns to me and grins broadly. "Er, what seems to be the trouble, Mr. McKeezick?" he enquires.

"Me and the lad you just placed in a horizontal position had a little debate about personalities," I explains. "I done my best to convince him that he was a complete, absolute bust as a side-show talker, but he had the nerve to deny it. So I fires him, *pour le sport;* but instead of thanking me for the free character study, he decides to crown me with that tent stake. Ungrateful, hey? However, I gotta have some guy up there on the bally to tell the folks on the outside what a great show we have on the inside, but this gent and Mr. Cipher are twins."

"Er, what did this fellow have to do?" asks Omar, pricking up his ears.

"About the same as nothing," I replies truthfully. "All he had to do was to deliver a stereotyped lecture on the wondahs of the woild, and induce the folks to come in and see 'em. If that's hard toil, then a coal miner can manicure his nails whilst attending to business."

"Is *that* all he had to do?" demands Omar, somewhat the surprised. "Say, Mr. McKeezick, I bet I could do that stuff myself! No fooling, since I been taking them confidence-lessons from Professor Baxter, I feel that I could talk in Congress."

"Maybe so," I admits. "But you ain't had no experience in show business."

"Did he have any, when he started?" asks Omar, pointing at the dozing Cock-Eye.

"Kid," I says, "pick up the marbles, you win! As the matter of facts, he wouldn't have any experience if he lectured for six hundred years. But really, Big Boy, to get away with a job like this you got to have plenty of tongue, the nerve of a quack spirit medium, and the voice of the smile that wins."

"That just fits me," he admits modestly. "I have always wanted to travel with a circus, and this looks like my chance! Besides, I could be with Beatrice—I mean, Professor Baxter—and take my lessons in spare time. Gosh, wouldn't that be dandy?"

Well, maybe it would. Nothing ventured, nothing pained; and I figure Omar couldn't possibly be worse than Mons. Egan.

"Just the moment, feller," I says, and goes in the tent to my frayed kister and dig up the typewritten lecture, telling all about our great attractions, if any.

"Take this contribution to bum oratory," I says, "and study it like it was the will of a rich uncle. When you know it like a New York Night Club knows a sucker, come back and go to work. Get me?"

"Okay!" beams Omar, tickled silly at joining the show. "I'll be back in less than no time. Please tell Professor Baxter that I am going to work for the show. I'll bet she'll be surprised, eh?"

ONE hour later Omar comes breezing down the midway, like his Aunt Sarah had just been treated by the embalmer, leaving him the sole air.

"Try me out!" he begs. "I have not only studied the lecture, but I have added a few choice bits of my own. Le's go!"

"You wouldn't fool me, would you?" I asks, figuring it was the bit too quick for him to memorize the spiel. "Don't be over confident; remembah, you ain't had no experience talking in public."

"Yes, I have, Mr. McKeezick. One time, in school, I recited Lincolns' 'Gettysburg Address' and pop told me afterwards that Lincoln, himself, didn't do any better."

"That settles it," I admits. "Hop up on the bally-stand and do your stuff. I'll give you a coupla or three days to get the hang of it."

To say that Omar turned out to be the greatest side-show talker since Demonthenes dumbfounded the House of Lords—is there anything wrong with this picture?—anyways, to remark that the kid held the audience in the palm of his mitt wouldst be stretching the truth too far. In fact, the truth would bust. However, he was at least as good on his first attempt as Cock-Eye was on his last, so what would you? Naturally, the lad was the wee trifle nonplused on his first two or three attempts, but before the day was over I congratulated myself on being a astute picker of budding Bryans.

"Am I getting along okay?" he asks, when the toil of day was o'er.

"Your satisfaction is guaranteed," I says. "Beatrice has certainly ribbed you up with a load of choice and fancy confidence."

"Hasn't she, though? I'm studying Lesson Eight now, entitled *The Power of Selfless Thinking*, and she says I'll be all cured within the next few weeks."

To make a clean breast of matters, he was cured in less time than that!

Two days later things took a sudden turn, as the flivver driver remarked to the traffic cop. Just before we opened for the days toil, Omar comes racing down the midway with a bunch of beauteous roses in his arm.

"Where did you trip over them?" I asks, with my usual politeness.

"Will you do a favor for me?" he wants to know, blushing a deep crimson.

"If it's for a noble purpose, why not?"

"I guess you'd call it noble and—er—romantic," he retorts, dropping his eyes. "You see, I want you to take these roses in to Miss Baxter, with my compliments."

"Are you maimed in the legs?" I demands. "Why not squeak for yourself, John—as Priscilla remarked to Jack Alden? Hell—I thought you had acquired a large supply of nerve and confidence!"

"I sure have! But—er—you don't understand, Mr. McKeezick. Won't you please take them in?"

Not wishing to irritate young love's scream by more kidding, I grabs the bouquet and rushes 'em in to the coy Beatrice.

"Compliments of your pupil and admirer, Mr. Omar Gimpey, Jr.," I says, bowing very low. "A sap for the ages, hey?"

"Just what do you mean?" she flares—and believe me, ladies and gents, that gal could flare!

Being a great student of the fee-male of the species, I knew how to win a debate without getting my block knocked off, to wit; have your say first, then slam the door behind you. Nifty idea, what?

Well, to come to the end of a perfect jay, during the rest of the week Omar bought bon bons, assorted bouquets and knick-knacks for Mademoiselle Beatrice, using me each time as the errand boy. As to his work on the bally-stand, he's getting better and better, and I begin to have visions of him developing into the world's best side-show spieler. Then affairs took a turn for the worst, as the quack remarked when the patient departed hence.

Saturday afternoon, I noticed a familiar looking gil buying a ticket for the third or fourth time that week. He's a tall, bronzed guy, between forty-five and good health, and looks the bit like Buffalo Bill, when Bill was the same age. After taking a good slant at this lad it strikes me that I had seen him back in the previous town, Gin Gulch, and he had paid admission to the side-show no less than four times.

"Beg pahdon, stranger," he says to me, after he had bought his ticket, "but do you know if Miss Baxter is at liberty just now?"

"Maybe so," I replies. "But shill in, anyways—if she's busy, just stick around a moment."

"Thanks," he drawls, and strolls in.

I chance to turn around to the left and I'm puzzled to see the head of Omar Gimpey rising slowly from behind the bally-stand. Looking more frightened than a elephant at a convention of mice, he comes dashing over to me.

"Do—do you know who that man was, Mr. McKeezick?" he asks, breathlessly.

"A Elk or a Mason," I says, which is a very good example of my usual wit and humor.

My guess is as wrong as ice cream in Greenland!

"That—that was my father!" he blurts. "And I bet I know what he's doing around here!"

"What?" I asks.

"He's got wind that I'm in love with Miss Baxter, and I think he's trying to stop it!"

RIGHT away I get another angle to the fair Beatrice! Whilst she's kidding Gimpey, junior, she is making Gimpey, senior, pay her plenty of sugar to let go his son. Had she of lived in the days of Julius McCeasar, she couldst of grabbed six Mark Antonys whilst Cleopatra was annoying one. But she couldn't fool me.

On second thought, boys and girls, she did!

"I think he also came around when we was playing Gin Gulch," goes on the perturbed Omar. "Did you ever notice him?"

"Undoubtlessly," I says. "I was just trying to place him before you spoke, and I am sure I have seen the pater at Gin Gulch."

"Gosh," moans Omar. "Gosh!"

"Aw, forget it," I says; "and get down to business. There's a good crowd in front of the joint. Hop up on the bally and give 'em the spiel."

I could tell by the way he started the lecture that his heart wasn't in it. When he finished, only a few customers bought ducats.

"That spiel sounded as flat as an alderman's head!" I says, disappointed. "Are you really in love or in dutch—the same being twins, in my opinion?"

"Well, I may as well get it over with, Mr. McKeezick!" he snaps.

"Get what over with?" I asks. "Try again in English—I ain't much good at the Sam Lloyd stuff."

"What do you think of marriage, Mr. McKeezick?" is his next act, and you could have knocked me over with a brick!

"What do *I* think? Listen, kid, and you shall hear—!?!!$$??!"

"Are you married, Mr. McKeezick?" he goes on, puzzled at my frank opinion of harried life.

"You can guess it, can't you? You don't see any buttons on my shirt, do you?"

"Been married long?" is his next irritation.

"Would you mind changing the subject to something more interesting—such as croup, measles and broken legs?" I begs.

"It must be fine to have a good little wife waiting for you when you come home in the evening, don't you think? You know, the sort of girl who can cook tasty meals."

"Personally, I ain't been flooded with no home-cooked meals. Too many delicatessen joints in my neighborhood, and a guy wouldst be a brute to expect the little woman to attend the movies and the kitchen range at the same time. But say, what in Helen of Troy are you driving at?"

"Just this: I'm twenty-one next week, and I am in love with Miss Baxter. And if father hasn't spoiled everything, I'm going to ask her to be my wife on my birthday. Won't that be a great idea?"

"Undoubtlessly," I admits. "Undoubtlessly."

Our next stand was laboring under the touching monicker of Yokel Haven, a short jump of twenty miles from Lariat Loop. Not wishing to keep you in suspense—or awake—any longer, I'll confess now that Yokel Haven was the last I saw of Omar Gimpey. Ah me alas and alackaday!

Well, as the Old Oaken Bucket remarked to the tourist, business was good in Yokel Haven, thanks to Omar's brand of forensic oratory. He seemed to be all primed with a new fever—Swedish for love—and the way he turned the customers into the tent would have been a treat to Barnum. Another reason for his good spirits was the fact that his dear pater, i. e., pop, had not been seen around lately, and that was a load off his back. Monday he bought his teacher a week's supply of fancy candies, and on Tuesday he came in with a bottle of French *parfum*—whatever that is—and employed me as the messenger boy. On Wednesday, he gave one and all a treat by appearing on the campus—pardon, midway—encased in a new sartorial outfit, meaning snappy tan suit, grey spats, silk shirt, and gold-tipped cane. No kidding, had Beau Brummel got a peek at Omar's make-up he would of taken a beaker of arsenic and checked out. Not being content to dazzle us with what-the-swell-dressed-man-will-wear, he's carrying in his arms the most fragrant and beauteous bunch of roses I have ever seen.

"Do you mind taking these in to Miss Baxter?" he asks. "I promise you that this will be the last time I'll ask you to favor me. Honest, Mr. McKeezick!"

"Do it yourself, Big Boy," I says, the bit fed up on doing the work of the A. D. T. and Postal boys. "Besides, no jane likes to receive her presents second-handed. And say, where's all that confidence you have acquired, hey? I thought you had so much nerve that you wouldn't be afraid to pay court to a queen, even whilst the king was hanging around the palace. If you really love the gal, why in Romeo don't you dash in, place the flowers in her arms, and then pop the question? Sweep her off her feet, what I mean!"

"Who says I'm afraid?" he bristles. "I'm over-loaded with pep and confidence and I wouldn't be afraid to give orders to Coolidge! But—er—just take them in this time, Mr. McKeezick."

"That proves that you're timid and afraid!" I says. "Why, you ain't got the guts of a jellyfish. If you have, les' see you strut in and do your stuff!"

"Think I'm afraid, eh?" he snaps. "All right! Here—just hold this cane until I come out. I'll show you who's afraid!"

With shoulders squared, and jaws set in determination, Omar rushed into the tent. I liked the kid, and in my heart I wished him luck—any one who gets married needs it. However, love will find a jay!

A minute later he comes dashing out, face flushed with excitement. Breezing by me like I was a complete set of diphtheria, he hotfoots it down the midway in high gear. I naturally figure that he has made the quickest marriage proposal on record and is now off to get the minister to perform the crime. With that in mind, I dash in to congratulate Beatrice on booking the son of a wealthy fish. Honest, raw as it was, I had to admire the gal's neat work. She not only takes a raw, timid youth and hops him up with pep and confidence, but then calmly proceeds to grab him off for herself. Not bad, eh girls?

"Beatrice," I begins, "a gal like you deserves praise and has mine! I been watching your work on that grade-A hick, and I'm glad you won. I wish you many happy returns of the day and—er—how about a little cut-in on the loot? I'm the guy who steered him into your joint, remembah!"

For a long moment, she looks at me like I had just materialized out of the air.

"Are you so happy that you can't talk?" I goes on. "Snap out of it, girlie!"

"I always thought you was crazy," she says, "but now you prove it! What's more, I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Don't give me no pushing around," I grins. "You shouldn't be afraid to let your old friend, Doc, in on the secret. Omar's a fine young feller, and I'm glad you hooked 'im. Come clean, lady!"

"I wish to heavens I knew what this idiot was talking about!" she flares.

"What!" I yelps. "D'yer mean to sit there and tell me that Omar didn't just come in here and propose marriage to you?"

"Is that what he wanted to say?" she asks, surprised.

"What did you think he came in for—to sell you a quart of spinach? Aw, come now—tell us the truth!"

"Very well," she says, "I'll tell you the truth, although it's none of your business. First, Omar Gimpey, Jr., did come in here just now, but he did not propose. In fact, he just placed the roses on my lap and then blushed, stuttered something, and rushed right out. And it is just as well that he did."

"D'yer mean to tell me that you would pass up a live bet like that?" I asks, dumbfounded. "Think of the loot his old man has!"

"I have," she replies with a saucy toss of her head. "And what's more, *stupid*, Mr. Omar Gimpey, *senior*, and yours truly are engaged to be married next month."

This jay out!

BAD MEN

Of The New West

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

RASCALS are making the casual tourists of the West understand something of the spirit of the stand-and-deliver hold-ups of stagecoach days. We skirt the brim of trouble every time we pass one of those impudent hitch-hikers who depend for their transportation on gasoline, oil, and automobiles earned by others. Willing to beg, to mooch a lift, they are close to petty pilfering—and the next step is robbery with violence.

Rolling up the new road out of Reno, Nevada, westward over the Lincoln Highway to Truckee, we saw three groups of hitch-hikers. Among them were two burly fellows who snarled as we passed. They were obliged to walk five or six miles because passersby did not care to burden their machines with excess weight on the heavy mountain grades. Extending the hospitality of the road to men like that, husky scallawags, is to jeopardize outfits, and even life itself, for attacks have been made on tourists by these vagabonding criminal hitch-hikers.

Just as sneaks used to roll insensible drunks in mine camps, so the touring sneaks lurk through camp grounds. They've lifted a brush, a wrench, other trifles from me. On two or three occasions when I rolled into the wrong kind of garage for some repair I found the stealthy, indescribable suggestion of criminal bands lurking close at hand. They are men as desperate as any who ever worked the mine camps of the old days.

A feeling every experienced tourist will recognize is that subtle feel of a place which gives warning of jeopardy. One camp ground or nook will have the look and feel of a fine over-night stopping place. Another is quite the reverse. I recall a tiny town called Kremling where we thought of camping on a creek flat for the night. We did not, instead we went on into a sagebrush wilderness to stop at a ranch fence. Sure enough, when our vacuum system began to take in the motor fuel bought in the town we found it was cheap kerosene instead of gasoline. We had done far better to continue on in response to our hunch.

Yesterday I was in Bodie, a ghost city of California. There it stands with boarded windows, decrepit gambling hells, saloons, dance-halls. I stood beside a heap of whisky, gin, and brandy bottles. I went into tiny buildings, once the homes of men, twelve feet or so square. I went into a leading store, built of flattened tin cans in front, and home-made brick behind.

More than a dozen tourists were poking around the ruins. They were walking in the streets of the Town That Was. They were themselves the equal of the liveliest spirit who ever walked those thoroughfares, sneaking through noisome alleys, shivering in wintry winds, awakening from prolonged debauch, murdering or about to be killed, reckless, wild and hopeful. The tourist is a wandering Power of Curiosity now, instead of a hungry wretch shaken by his own follies and breaking under his own ignorance, suffering torments of hunger in a land filled with game, dying of starvation among streams filled with fish.

There are other kinds of hold-up in the West. On the way in an auto, one will run into the nervous hold-up by the State of California's quarantine outposts. These quarantine inspectors and inspections are an adventure in themselves. They are a nice little surprise for the tourists coming west. Arizona, and other states have them, and when everybody is in a jumpy mood, one is fumigated. disinfected, and laughed at or cussed, according to how one takes it. And the work is mostly bug hunting. I hear they found 163 alfalfa bugs on a car out of the north, and there was no telling what Oregon, in retaliation, would find on cars out of the south.

Part Three

The Desert Moon MYSTERY

An Enthralling Story of a Murder on a Western Ranch

By KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN

Preceding events briefly retold

The Desert Moon Ranch, Nevada, is the scene of a mysterious murder. On the ranch at the time is a curious collection of individuals. Each has an important bearing on the story and so we shall list them as follows:

Mary Magin, the middle-aged housekeeper who tells the story.

Sam Stanley, the wealthy owner of the ranch, a mild and lovable giant of a man.

John, his adopted son, an upstanding young man of twenty-five.

Martha, the adopted daughter, twenty-one years old, physically well and attractive but with the mentality of a child of five.

Mrs. Ricker, who came to the ranch to take care of John and Martha. A strange and silent woman.

Hubert Hand, who came to the ranch years ago to recover his health and has stayed ever since.

Chadwick Caufield, a born musician, a ventriloquist and so entertaining Sam Stanley won't let him leave the ranch.

The Canneziano twins, Danielle (Danny) and Gabrielle (Gaby) who are alike in face and figure but entirely different in manners, dress and disposition. Danny is quiet, sweet, well bred. Gaby is loud, racy and has a violent temper.

In the past, Margarita, Sam's wife, ran away with an Italian puncher, Canneziano. Sam got a divorce and Canneziano and Sam's divorced wife were married. The twins were the fruit of that marriage and after their mother's death, Sam, although he despised their father, helped the twins financially and otherwise.

At the opening of the story, the girls, now twenty-four have arrived from Europe for their first visit to the ranch since they were eight years old.

The interrelations of the twins with the rest of the household are:

Danny and John are much attached to each other and in two weeks are engaged.

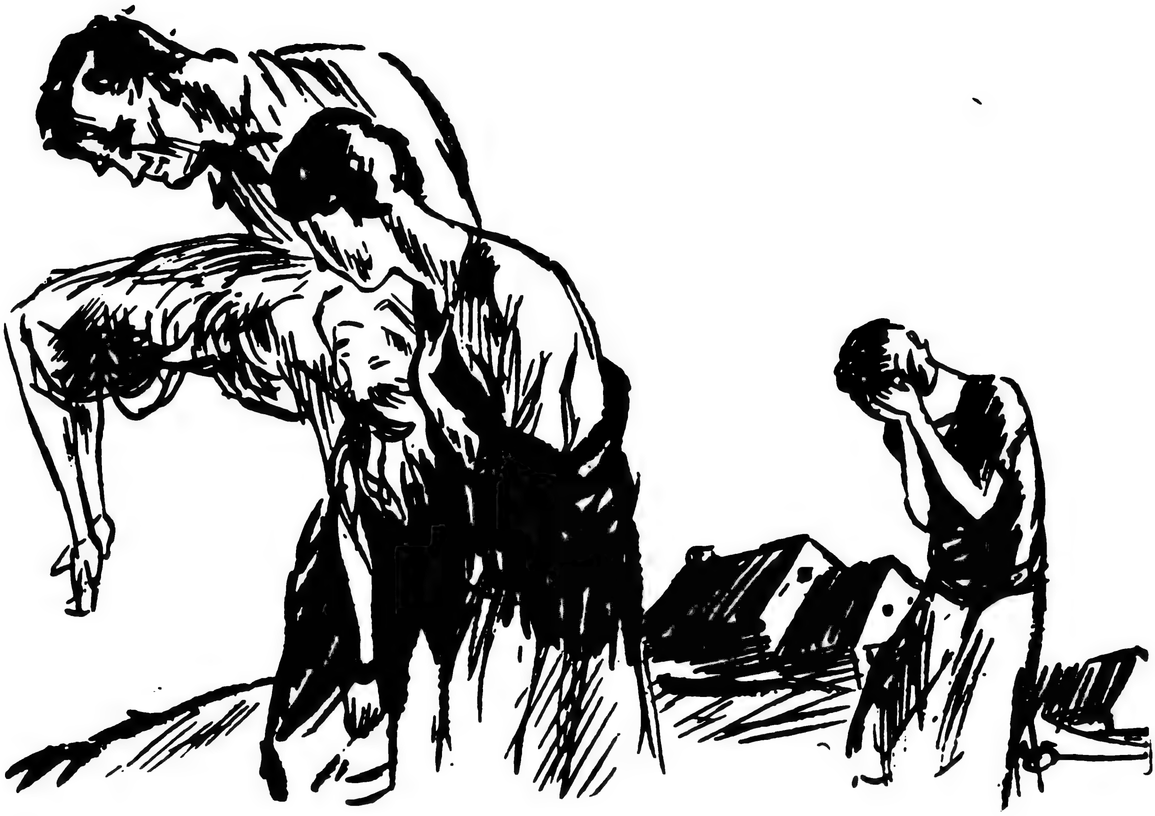
Gaby openly makes love to John, trying to win him away from Danny but is entirely unsuccessful. John dislikes her as do all the others excepting Hand and Chad.

Hand plays around with Gaby, making idle love to her. She reciprocates in kind. Chad openly and hopelessly idolizes Gaby but she pays no attention to him. Martha dislikes Gaby with a violent childish aversion.

Danny is hurt by Gaby's attentions to John but there seems to be a strong sisterly affection between them. During the girls' two months' stay at the ranch Mary has overheard the twins talking and learns they are hunting for something on the Desert Moon—something connected with revenge. She also overhears Mrs. Ricker tell Hand that she would like to kill Gaby. John himself has told Mary he would like to strangle Gaby for making Danny unhappy.

The air is tense with mystery and suspense.

On the afternoon of July Fourth, when all the help have left the ranch to attend a rodeo, Gaby comes downstairs and goes out, presumably for a walk. Before she leaves she has a short con-



versation with Chad on the porch. Immediately after Gaby's departure Danny calls to her from the head of the stairs, learns Gaby has left and soon comes down into the living-room herself. The entire household is present in the living-room except: John, who has gone to Rattail to get the mail, Martha who is out feeding the rabbits and Gaby who has just left for a walk.

Martha soon comes in highly pleased, exhibiting a gold bracelet which she says Gaby has just given her. Martha has always coveted this bracelet and up to the present time Gaby wouldn't even let her touch it.

All remain in the house for a couple of hours. Then Mary goes out to start supper. Danny sets the table and brings things in from the kitchen. Mrs. Ricker remains in the living-room and Martha goes to sleep on the sofa. Sam, Chad and Hand go out to the barn to milk the cows.

After their return all eat supper wondering where Gaby is and why John hasn't yet returned from town.

As they are finishing the meal John drives in, going around to the back door and insists on going upstairs to clean up before eating. He remains upstairs quite a while, and when he comes down he refuses any food, saying it is too hot to eat.

By this time all are worried about Gaby. Sam, John, Danny and Mary drive down the road in the car to look for her. Chad and Hand scout around the place on ponies, Mrs. Ricker and Martha remain at home.

After searching an hour or so the two parties are forced back to the ranch by a heavy shower. While they are closing various windows and doors Mary, the methodical housekeeper, remembers that the attic windows are wide open and she sends Chad up to close them.

Chad goes upstairs and shouts back that the attic door is locked. Mary goes up to investigate. She finds Chad's report is true and Chad goes downstairs to find a key.

Mary, standing there waiting, puts her hand in her pocket for a handkerchief and finds a key. It fits the attic door and she opens it.

About half way up the stairs is Gaby, lying in a huddle. Mary tries to scream but cannot. Then on the red carpet she sees something that shocks her frightfully. Dropped all over a bright beaded bag, lying there, are burned tobacco and ashes from Sam's pipe.

All her horror concentrates into a frantic desire to get those ashes cleared away, she sweeps them up into her handkerchief which she puts in her pocket. As she gets to her feet Chad comes up.

"Call the others," she says, "Gaby is here—murdered!" Then she faints.

While they are reviving Mary, Chad goes out of the house and shoots himself. He leaves a note confessing to Gaby's murder.

All would like to believe Chad's confession but Sam cannot accept it as true because he was with Chad all the afternoon.

A brief note is found in Gaby's pocket saying she expected to be murdered. It tells nothing else except asking Danny to take her body to San Francisco and have it cremated and expressing her love for Danny.

The coroner arrives and an inquest is held re-

sulting in a verdict of "killed by person or persons unknown."

The household is torn by doubt and suspicion—each member having his own pet theory which involves other members. There are clues and more clues that on discovery seem important but lead nowhere. In desperation Sam calls a conference in which everyone is requested to air his own suspicions before them all. Sam hopes this course will clear the atmosphere and kill a lot of false clues. The situation on the ranch has become intolerable to him.

Hubert Hand talks first. He states he suspects John because John is the only one who cannot account for every minute of his time on the afternoon of the murder.

CHAPTER XXVIII

JOHN TALKS

"IF YOU mean me, Dad," John spoke right up, and I'd have given a pretty penny to have had him say something else, for, of course, Sam had not meant him, "I'm not worried. They don't hang innocent men in Nevada, no matter how much rope their friends present them with."

"As a matter of fact," Hubert Hand said, "I guess they don't hang any men in Nevada, now, do they? Lethal chamber, isn't it?"

Sam growled at him to shut up; and told John that it was his turn to talk, and to go ahead, and to try to talk sense, if possible.

"I don't know where to begin," John said. "I've got nothing to talk about."

"Begin at the beginning. What did Gaby say to you, after dinner, that made you decide, right off, to go to Rattail?"

"I've told you that already. I've got no changes to make in it. Gaby told me, after dinner, that Danny's headache was getting worse. She said that Danny had sent to Salt Lake for a certain kind of headache medicine, the only kind that ever did her any good. She said it should have come in the morning's mail. She said that Danny would be peeved at her for telling me about it—asking me to go, that is. So, if I didn't want a fuss, and wanted to be allowed to go, I'd better make a sneak of it, with no explanations. I did. Here is something I haven't told, though; for Danny just told me, when we came in here at three. She hadn't sent for any headache medicine to Salt Lake, nor anywhere, and she never had. That certainly looks as if Gaby wanted to get either me, or the sedan, off the job and out of the way, yesterday afternoon. She must have had some reason for sending me on a fool's errand like that."

"Well, well, go on, Son," Sam said, after we had all sat in dead silence for about a minute.

"Go on where?" John asked. "I've got nothing more to say. Hand's told the rest of it, hasn't he?"

"Answer him, you fool," Sam roared. "You've got answers, haven't you? Use 'em! Sitting there like a dummy! Did anyone see you towing Saule to his place?"

"Not that I know of. I towed him all right; but I can't prove it. Hand was right when he said he could be bought for a half dollar. He might come cheaper. I'd try him with a quarter, first, Hand."

"Good God!" Sam shouted. "What are you trying to do? Pry your way into the lethal chamber? Can you give a reason for driving to the back door, instead of leaving the car in the garage?"

"Only two hundred-pound sacks of rock salt. They'd dumped them on the platform for us that morning from eighteen. I could give a reason for bringing them up, instead of leaving them there until we went down with the truck. Sure, I'm full of reasons. Got a good reason for taking half an hour to bathe and dress. It would be hard to find a guy with more reasons than I can produce for everything—all but, murdering the twin sister of the girl I love."

"Son," Sam said, "I don't blame you a damn bit for being sore clear to the bone. But, come to that, we haven't any right to blame Hand, here, either; not if he is honest in his suspicions, and, maybe, he is. I forced them out of him. Can't you swallow your pride, for a while, and—"

"I've swallowed it already," John said, "if that's what you want. Swallowed it till I'm choked with it."

"I know. I know. But it is like this, John—and this goes for all you folks, too—a person can't get to the bottom of anything without going down. In this case, it looks like we were going to have to go pretty low down—a trip to hell for most of us, I reckon. But it will be a round trip. Most of us will come up clean, to a clean Desert Moon. Can't we go down, then, like a lot of reasonable human beings, and not like a kennel of yapping dogs?"

"It won't hold, Dad," John answered. "Not this round trip to hell stuff, as human beings. If I hadn't stopped being a human being; that is, a man, I wouldn't have sat still here and let Hand have his say out. And I wouldn't have done it, not to save my own neck. But I know how you feel about the ranch. I've gone through with it for that reason, and—for Danny, though I know that all of it is a rotten mistake on your part. I know that; but it is no use telling you, now that you've started. I'll go on with it, the best I can. I guess the others will, too. But none of us will come up clean, as you say. Don't look for that—not after this muck. All right. Hop to it, Dad. What's your next question?"

I was relieved when Sam asked, "Do you suspicion, with reason, anyone in this room?" I had thought, following right along with Hubert Hand's accusations, as Sam had been doing, that his next question would be about what was troubling and bothering John when he came in. Why he had acted so queerly that he had had to explain it by saying he was loco from the sun.

"I do not," John answered Sam's question, straight. "But it seems darn queer to me the way everyone is leaving Chad's suicide out of this. Hold on, Dad! I'm not saying that I think Chad killed her. I know he didn't. But I know just as well that he didn't walk out and shoot himself simply because he had loved Gaby. Chad was a queer bird, all right. I guess none of us understood him very well. He was as emotional as the deuce, too—I'll grant that. But he was not, ever, a damn fool."

"John!" Danny interrupted. "Do you think that a man who kills himself, when he finds that the girl he loves has been cruelly murdered, needs to be a fool?"

"Yes," John answered. "A man might not care much about living, after that, but if he killed himself he'd be a fool. I mean—it is like this. Regular fellows, and Chad sure was one, don't walk out and kill themselves, when they find the girl they love is dead. It takes more than death to make a real man kill himself. Sounds like a book, I know; but, loss of honor is a reason, and shame—maybe that's the same thing—is another reason. Or, a fellow might kill himself to save the honor of his girl—or to save a friend's life, if he owed the friend a lot—"

Danny interrupted again. "Absolute despair should be a reason—"

"Sure, I know how you mean. But Chad had despaired of Gaby's love long ago. Dozens of times I've seen her treat him so rottenly that, if he had been the suicidal sort, he would have killed himself right then. No sir. I tell you Chad did not shoot himself because Gaby was dead. Sure, that was a part of it; but not the main part.

"Chad was a darn good guy. Good all the way through. We all know that he didn't kill her. We'd know it, if Dad didn't have his alibis for him. But what I'm getting at is, that, someway or other, and not meaning to at all, he got himself mixed up in it. When he saw what had happened, and realized that he had been involved—There's your reason, all right. I think that, if we can find out why Chad shot himself, we'll find out most of the other things we want to know. I'm through, Dad. I've said all I've got to say, and more too."

Sam hesitated a minute. I was relieved to see him take Chad's note out of his pocket. "Chad says that he killed her," he said, and read the note aloud. Everyone but me, to whom it was no surprise, and Martha, who was almost asleep again, squeaked, or gasped, or otherwise showed their horrified astonishment.

John spoke first. "I'll bet four dollars he never wrote it."

Sam passed the paper to him. "It looks like his writing. It sounds like him too. Soon as I can get track of one of these what-you-may-call-em's, handwriting experts, I'm going to send it to him. I reckon it will match up all right. I wish there was an expert of some kind that we could send it to, to find out why he wrote it."

"Uncle Sam," Danny said, and I could see that the note had upset her pretty badly, "there is something no one has thought of. We haven't had time to think. But, where was Chad during the hour we were hunting for Gaby? You, and John, and Mary and I were in the sedan. But where were the others, during that time; between seven and eight o'clock, wasn't it?"

"I reckon," Sam spoke real gently to her, "that we have all had time to do some tall thinking about that hour, little girl. But there couldn't be any doubt that Gaby had been dead a sight longer than an hour, when we found her."

"But can you know that, for a certainty?" Danny insisted.

"Just as certain as I know that she was dead, Danny. I—well, in the early days here—never mind that, though. I've had experience with deaths, kind of on that order. I know. The coroner and the sheriff knew. But, she might have been brought into the house during that hour. Hand let loose on his alibi business a little too early—"

"I'm no fool," Hubert Hand interrupted. "You admit that she could not have been murdered during the hour between six and seven. Every one of us, except John, can account for every minute of our time from four o'clock, when we saw Gaby alive, up to seven."

"All right. All right," Sam said. "Have it your own way. But you've had your say, and plenty of time to say it in. You'll maybe have another turn later. Now, keep still. We are going to hear from the others.

"It is your turn next, Danny. I'm sorry. You understand, we haven't any time to lose. Take it easy, though. Do you suspicion, with reason, anyone in this room of being connected with the murder?"

CHAPTER XXIX

DANNY

"I THINK," Danny said, "that Chad did it."

Sam lowered his brows, and turned those blue searchlights of his on her. "That is a bad beginning, my girl," he said, kindly enough, though. "You don't think that. Not for a minute. Better start over again."

"Uncle Sam," she pleaded, "listen. You spoke about clearing everyone's name, and about the honor of the Desert Moon. Chad's confession does that—does all of it. Why not let well enough alone?"

My own words; but I had not expected to hear them from Danny. The only reason for them seemed to be that Hubert Hand had frightened her with his case against John. Was she the sort of girl who would keep on loving John, and marry him, if she thought that he had killed her sister? I did not believe it.

John said, "Danny!" And, knowing as little as I do about being loved, I knew that I should hate to have my sweetheart pronounce my name with a pinch of horror, and a pinch of anger, and a big dash of bewilderment, as John had pronounced hers.

Sam said, "Somebody else suggested that today, Danny. I told them that there was no question of well enough while the man who had murdered your sister was going about alive, and while his helper was keeping his secret on the Desert Moon."

"*You* said that?" Danny questioned, and gave us all another severe shock by accenting the pronoun.

"I said that, yes." Sam showed signs of rising dander. "And I thought that you, if anyone, more than anyone, would agree with me."

"Only," she answered, "I should rather let a guilty person go free, escape, than to persecute an innocent person."

"No innocent person is going to be persecuted on the Desert Moon," Sam said, "and no guilty one is going to escape, either. You're going to be a good, sensible girl, too, and answer a few questions I want to ask you.

"First thing I want to know is, what was it that you girls were hunting for, all the time, here on the ranch?"

"We had been told," Danny answered, "that there was a very large sum of money hidden here on this place. We came to get it. That is—Gaby did. I mean—before we left the Continent I knew that I wanted to stay here, for a long time. I cared much more about staying here, and keeping Gaby here, than I cared about finding the money. Really, I—I hoped not to find the money. The people with whom I had been living in England had broken up their home there. I had no home. That is how I happened to be in Switzerland, with Gaby. I—"

She broke down, and hid her face in her hands. We all sat, quietly, and waited.

With her face still covered she appealed to Sam. "Uncle, I can't tell all this, today. I can't. I loved Gaby. I did love her. If she were alive— But she isn't. Please, please don't force me to go on with this."

"You've got me wrong, Danny," Sam said. "I didn't expect you to tell about all of your past lives, and that. But this stuff now about money hidden here. Could it have any bearing on the murder?"

She shook her head. "I think not. Not possibly. There was no money here, anyway, as it turned out. That is—if Gaby told me the truth about anything. I thought that she did. But now—she spoke of keeping fear and dread from me, in her last note to me. I—I can't talk of this, today, I tell you!"

"See here, Dad," John spoke up. "Danny isn't fit to go through with this today. I think she has told me everything she has to tell. She told me most of it this morning. I've got it straight. How about allowing me to go on with it?"

"Do you think any of it might have a bearing on the murder?"

"Yes, I think it might."

Sam banged on the table with his fist. "By God," he roared, "what kind of people have I got to deal with? Not five minutes ago, you sat right there and swore that you had told everything you knew. Couldn't even begin. Couldn't think of a thing to say. No suspicion. No hints of any kind, except a slur at a dead boy. Now you come out with this. By the Lord, Hand, you may be a better man than I think you are—"

Danny's voice cut in like scissors slithering through taffeta silk. "Be careful, there," she said. I remembered the way she had brushed the beaded bag. Something cold went trailing down my backbone. It was time, and past, I thought, for me to take a hand.

"Sam," I said, "what's become of all your fine talk about us not acting like yelping dogs, and swallowing our pride, and helping out, and so on? I told you, when you started this, that it was a fool piece of business. You, nor nobody, can force truth out of folks. You're kind of back on your quotations, or you'd remember the one about leading a horse to water. How do you think anyone is ever going to get any place with you pounding and shouting and blaspheming around all the while? If you think the fact that John wouldn't betray Danny's confidence to satisfy a crazy whim of yours makes him out a murderer, you've got less sense at sixty-five than you had when you were born. The best thing you can do, is to follow your advice to me, and be quiet. John's ready to talk now, if you'll give him a chance."

I have never yet seen the man who wouldn't quiet down, mild as mush, when a sensible woman took it on herself to give him a good scolding. The strongest man will drop before a good, strong volley of woman's words, the same as he would before a shooting squad.

"Go on, John," I said, seeing that Sam had dropped, and wanting John to get a start before Sam had had time to pick himself up, and dust off, and ask Danny what she had meant by hissing at him to be careful.

"Shall I, Danny?" John asked. She nodded.

"IT ISN'T any too pleasant, even for me," John began. "But the straight of it is, that while Danny, for years, was a companion to this lady in England, Gaby was running around over Europe with a darned rotten lot of associates. On the face of things, she was an actress—leading lady with a company that travelled all over the country—over several countries—giving plays. That seemed to be mostly a blind, though, for her real occupation, which was leading lady with a crew of blackmailers. Danny doesn't admit it, but I think there is no doubt but that she had a lover named Lewis Bauermont—something like that—. He was leading man in the theatrical company, manager of it, and also of the blackmailing gang.

"About six months before Danny wrote here, the lady, whom Danny had been serving as a companion, died. It left Danny at loose ends. She had stayed there more for love than for money. She had next to no money saved. Gaby wrote that she could give her a small part in her company. Danny joined her in France. She had been there a couple of weeks, when the company went on the rocks. Danny thought it was done purposely, since one of their blackmail victims was making it too hot for them.

"Gabrielle and Danny went to Switzerland. This Lewis what's-his-name—"

"Bauermont."

"Bauermont, showed up there in a few days and hung around. He and Gaby got to quarreling all the time. Gaby, who had always had plenty of money, began to be short of funds.

"Danny was as miserable as—well, as Danny would be in a mess like that. She remembered this place, and begged Gaby to come here, and rest a while, and get rid of this Bauermont, and the other hangers-on, and get ready to make a fresh start. You know, a clean start. Dan says Gaby had real ability as an actress; and that she could have easily found a position in some stock company in the United States. Gaby wouldn't listen to Danny's plan of coming here. But, once or twice, she used the idea as a threat to make this Bauermont bird come to terms. He wouldn't come. Later, Gaby began to give him some of his own blackmailing medicine. I guess he was pretty keen to get rid of her. And her having talked about the Desert Moon gave him his idea.

"He showed up one night with a letter from Canneziano, written from San Quentin. Bauermont was old enough, by the way, to have been Gaby's father. He and Canneziano had been pals here in the United States, years ago; and had gotten together again, three years ago, when Bauermont had been over here for six months. The letter, which had been forwarded all over this country and half of Europe, said only that he was to leave prison on the Fourth of July, and wanted to know where he could meet Bauermont shortly after that date. Probably all Canneziano wanted was to renew his old connections; but the letter was cryptic enough for Bauermont to make his story out of it.

"A cock-and-bull yarn about how he and Canneziano had held up that Tonopah mail train, three years ago—the train that was carrying a big shipment of currency for the federal reserve bank. A hundred thousand dollars, wasn't it? We all remember it, I guess. The robbers got away. Well, this Bauermont bird told the girls that he and Canneziano had been the robbers.

"It seems as if he made a pretty fair story out of it—how he and Canneziano had decided that every bank in the country would have the numbers of the bills by morning, and how they'd agreed to cache them in some safe place for a rather long time. They'd thought it best, too, to part company. So Bauermont went on to Salt Lake, and Canneziano, since we were handy, came and hid the money here on the ranch."

Sam interrupted. "Like hell he did!"

"No, of course he didn't, dad. I'm giving you Bauermont's story, that's all. According to him, Canneziano hid the money here. He was to have joined Bauermont in Salt Lake, but he got scared and went south instead, to 'Frisco. He'd been there only a few weeks, when he got pinched for running a gambling hall and sent up for three years.

"Bauermont went to see him after he was in prison. He told Bauermont that he had hidden the money here, all right; but he would not tell him where. He said it was safe, that no one could find it—not in a thousand years. That was all Bauermont could get out of him, except a promise to meet him, when he got out of prison, and come here with him to get the money.

"You, anyone, can see that the whole story is as full of holes as a sieve. I don't understand how Gaby ever fell for it. Danny will believe most anything anyone tells her. She is so honest herself, she thinks everyone else is honest. You can imagine how this plan, of coming here to get the money, went against the grain with her. But she was so desperate about Gaby, and the rottenness there, that she was willing to accept any plan to get Gaby away from there."

"I thought we could not find the money," Danny supplemented. "Though John says I believe anything, someway I never did fully believe that story. I never believed anything, really, that Lewis said. It was the only chance I had to get Gaby away from there—and I took it, on the principle, you know, of solving one problem at a time."

"Well," John said, "that's that. The letter Gaby got, a few days ago, was from this Bauermont. Danny could not read the code, but she has every reason to think that the copy Gaby read to her was genuine. In it he said that the whole thing, from start to finish, had been a put up job on Gaby. He and Canneziano had been in Denver at the time, had read all the account of the train robbery in the papers, and had kicked themselves to think that they hadn't been smart enough to have pulled it off themselves. But they had not;

had had no connection with the affair. The point of it was, that he had found another girl, was tired of Gaby, and wanted to ship her out of the way. Danny says the whole thing was an insult, from beginning to end; and that it seemed to have been written with no other motive than a desire to humiliate Gaby, twit her—laugh in her face. Apparently he is the kind of fellow who would enjoy that sort of thing, and he must have felt perfectly safe in doing so with Gaby literally thousands of miles away."

"It would be quite like him," Danny spoke up.

"Also," John added, "it would make the break between them pretty final."

"Sounds fishy to me," Sam mused. "If this fellow wanted to be shed of her, seems as if the best thing he could have done was to keep his mouth shut, and keep her here, hunting the hidden treasure until the end of time."

"I think," Danny answered, "that he thought Gaby might grow tired of searching, and return to him. Lewis knew that father was to be released, and that he and Gaby might meet at any time, and Gaby learn the truth. Lewis is mean and cruel. He wanted the zest—if you can possibly understand—of writing that cruel, wicked letter."

"See here," Sam said. "Suppose, after writing it, he got scared of what he had done. Gaby, you know, was—well, she was a pretty violent girl. He might have thought it over, and decided that it would be a lot safer to have her clear out of the way. Or, more likely, before he ever wrote that letter, he might have made arrangements with some one of his gang over here to come up and put her out of the way, shortly after she'd got the letter—"

"I move," Hubert Hand interrupted, "that we all adjourn, and go to hunt for the secret staircase and the concealed passage-way."

"Trying to be funny?" Sam asked, with a bright blue glare.

"Not at all. But the secret staircase is all that is lacking, isn't it? We've begun with the buried treasure, we've got the motive, and the international band of organized criminals. Slick. All there. Romantic and thrilling as you please. Only, it is a long way from Switzerland to Nevada and the key in Mary's pocket."

CHAPTER XXX

AN ACCUSATION

"DAMN the key in Mary's pocket!" Sam exploded. "I'm beginning to think I was right, at first, when I said that Mary locked the door, absent-mindedly, and dropped the key in her pocket herself."

I judged that I could wait until my turn came to mention that the key in my pocket was the old pass-key, and not the key to the attic door. In the next minute I wished that I had not waited, but had told it so that Sam might have busied his mind with that.

"Well, John," he said, "does that finish up the part of the story Danny couldn't tell?"

"I think so, Dad."

"All right. Now, Danny, what did you mean, a few minutes ago, when you warned me to be careful, like you did?"

"I—" Danny stammered, "I—wanted you to be careful about what you said, in anger."

"In other words, you wanted me to be careful about saying anything that would seem to implicate John?"

She did not answer.

"If John was guilty," Sam insisted, "would you want him to go scot free?"

"John is not guilty."

"How do you know that?"

"I know it in the same way that you all seem to know that Chad was not guilty. I know John."

"That's all right. But you can't know John's innocence like we know Chad's; because, from the time Gaby came downstairs, until we all set out to look for her, Chad was not out of my sight. He was at the piano. He walked to the barn with me. He stayed in the barn with me. He walked back to the house with me. He was with us all during supper."

"You," said Danny, "say that Chad was in the barn with you during all of that hour. I wonder whether Chad, if he were alive, could swear that you were in the barn with him, during all of that hour?"

"What do you mean by that, my girl?" Sam questioned.

Danny sat and stared at him, her eyes wide, her lips bitten in tight; sat and looked as if she were frightened plumb out of her senses, and did not say one word.

"You meant something when you said that," Sam insisted. "Now what was it? Come, speak up."

It was no way for him to talk to her, feeling as she felt, and her sister not yet in her grave. I was downright ashamed for him. I guess the others felt as I did, for Hubert Hand said, "Never mind. Lay off that, Sam. What do you expect to get from an hysterical girl. You don't deserve it; you let me down flat; but, just to prove that I'm a white man, I'll say that I know you were in the barn all the time. Of course, if I wasn't there, my testimony for you wouldn't amount to much. But you know damn well I was there; and I know damn well that you were. So let up on the little lady. Mary's turn, next, isn't it?"

"Hold on!" Sam said. "Since Danny's gone this far, she shouldn't grudge an extra word or two. Come, now, Danny. I don't aim to treat you mean, and you know I'm sorry for you, and feel for you in your trouble. But what is it you have on your mind?"

She sat there, still as a mouse; her lips tight, her big eyes bigger from fright.

I guess there is some of the brute in every man. I had never before suspected that Sam Stanley had his share.

"You'll have to talk when this case comes to court," he said. "It will come to court—don't forget that. Just now, it looks as if John were going to have to come up for trial. Your silence does him a sight more harm than good; you should know that."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, short and sharp, as if it hurt her. "It isn't John I am trying to shield. I am—I am trying to save his happiness for him, that's all. His happiness, and my own."

"Just now," John said, gently, "isn't the time to be thinking about our happiness, Danny. If you have anything to say—please say it."

"You won't blame me?" she pleaded. "You won't blame me, afterwards?"

"Could I blame you for telling what you think is the truth?"

"Hubert," she spoke suddenly, and very sharply, for her, "did you see Uncle Sam, all that time, in the barn? Could you see him, all the time, while you were milking the cows? He says he could not see you."

"No—" Hubert hesitated a moment, as he thought, "no—I guess that I didn't see him, all the time. He was at one end of the barn, and I was at the other. But I heard him talking to Chad all the time. They were kidding back and forth. Sam baiting Chad along; you know how they do—did. Sam was right there all the time, Danny. No getting away from that."

"But there is," she said. "You all seem to have forgotten it, but Chad was a mimic and a ventriloquist. He could have stayed there in the barn alone, and with no trouble at all, made you think that Uncle Sam was there, too, and that they were talking together."

I stopped breathing. I think the others stopped breathing. Their breaths would have sounded noisy in that silence. John spoke first.

"Four cows got milked. Chad couldn't milk. He never milked a cow in his whole life."

"How do you know?" Danny said, and I was surprized that she should oppose John like that. "You know only that Chad said he could not milk. We all know that he was lazy. And he was brought up on a farm—"

"How do you know that?" John echoed her own words.

"I don't know it. He told me that he was."

John said, "He told me that he was born and reared in Chicago."

"Shut up, John," Sam commanded. "Go on, Danny."

"That's all," she said. "Except, that if Chad could milk, that would have given Uncle Sam nearly all of that hour—"

"Dan!" John's voice sounded as if he were talking to one of his meanest broncos. "Stop it! Sitting here and accusing Dad, with no evidence—nothing but a crazy, wild idea—"

"That is not true. I have evidence. I picked up Gaby's bag from the steps yesterday evening. Tobacco, and pipe ashes were sticking to it. Only a few. I think someone had tried to brush them off, hurriedly, as a man might, and had made a poor job of it. No one else on this place smokes a pipe. No one else, anywhere, drops his pipe whenever he is excited." She turned to me. "That is what I told you I dared not tell—" She hid her face in her hands.

Sam's pipe fell from his mouth.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE SESSION ENDS

IT SEEMED to me that, when Sam's pipe hit the floor, it made a noise like doom cracking. We all sat still as stones. Sam did not pick up his pipe. I suppose it could not have been more than a minute, but it seemed a long time before John left Danny's side and went and picked up the pipe and handed it to Sam.

"It's all right, Dad," he said.

"Not by a damn sight, it's not all right," Sam came back to his senses vigorously. "But it is interesting—this thing. It is getting interesting, anyway. Let me see—If I had got Chad to help me—and I could have, by telling him it was some joke or other I had on hand—I could have sneaked out of the barn, met her and killed her, during that hour. When could I have got the body upstairs, though? That's the first missing link. My reason for killing her would be another, but—"

"Say! See here, Dad," John cut in.

"You shut up, Son. We are waiting to hear the rest of what Danny has to say. Come, Danny, can you supply either of those missing links?"

"No," she said, and sighed. It was easy to see that she was plumb tuckered out. "No, of course I can't."

"If," Sam went on, seemingly talking entirely to himself, "if I'd hurried like blazes, I might have done the deed, and carried her into the house during the time I was absent from the barn. I'd have had to pass Mary in the kitchen—I'd have been bound to sneak in the back way—but, if I asked her not to, more than likely Mary wouldn't tell on me. Or, I might have had a hireling (that's what they call them, isn't it? There's another word, something like—marmot—no, never mind.) on the outside, who would have toted the body in for me, while we were at supper."

Written out, that sounds as if Sam had been trying to be comical. He was not at all. He was sitting there, speaking his thoughts for all to hear, making out a case against himself, cool as Christmas. For my part, I had heard enough of it.

"Sam, you look here—" I began.

"You shut up, too, Mary," Sam said.

Mrs. Ricker spoke. She had her say out. Nobody, not even Sam, would any more think of telling Mrs. Ricker to shut up, than they would think of telling any other dumb object, that suddenly started to talk, to shut up. Leading a life of silence, I thought, certainly did have its advantages, at times.

"I think," Mrs. Ricker said, "that the girl herself probably killed her sister. If Sam's pipe ashes were on the bag, she put them there, afterwards, to make trouble for him."

Sam said, "Shucks!"

I thought John would be the first to speak. I was mistaken.

It was Danny herself who said, "Make her talk, now, Uncle Sam. Don't wait for her turn. I—can't bear it. Make her talk now, and give her reasons for saying such a cruel, wicked, lying thing."

"Mrs. Ricker," Sam put the question very solemnly, "have you any reasons for making this accusation?"

"My only reason is, that I believe it."

"Don't beat around the bush. Why do you believe it?"

"I have a feeling that she is guilty."

"This," Sam said, sternly, "is no time for feeling, nor for quibbling. You made a serious accusation—straight out. I want your reason, or reasons for making it, and I want them just as straight."

"I have no reasons," Mrs. Ricker said. "That is why I suspect her."

"Ah-ah-ah! Women!" Sam said; and the way he said it, it was the blackest oath he had used that day.

I looked at Danny. I had not been feeling any too kindly toward her, for the past few minutes; but, just the same, seeing her there, with her hands caught up to her throat, all white and pitiful, and with the echo of Sam's last blasphemy still in my ears, I had a woman feeling toward her. I knew then, as I know now, that Danielle Canneziano could no more have killed Gaby than she could have created her.

"I think," I said, talking fast to keep Sam from shutting me up before I could get anything said, "that if, in suspicioning an innocent girl like Danny, Mrs. Ricker is simply drawing on her woman's instinct, she'd better pass it up, for the present, and listen to some plain sexless sense.

"Gaby came downstairs at four. Danny called after her, right then; so Danny was in the house right then. Gaby went to the rabbit hut and stopped long enough to give

Martha the bracelet. Almost as soon as Martha was in the house with the bracelet, Danny was downstairs with us, cool, collected, and undisturbed. Now suppose, as an idiot suggested this morning, that Gaby had come straight back into the house. I guess everyone would agree that it would take her five minutes to get back upstairs. That would leave Danny, not more than ten minutes to kill her, and to come downstairs, as I've said, collected and undisturbed. Come to think of it, Gaby could not have talked to Martha and got to the attic stairway in any five minutes. At the widest figuring, that leaves Danny about five minutes—"

As I had been fearing he would, Sam stopped me. "That's all right, too, Mary. But there is no need to draw so long a bow. No need to count minutes on Danny. The note in Gaby's bag fixes her innocence better than all the minutes on the clock could."

"No, it does not," Mrs. Ricker said. "Gaby knew that she had reason to fear an enemy. She probably found that out from the code letter. She may never have suspected that the enemy was her own sister."

"I wish I knew," Sam said, giving Mrs. Ricker a long look, "what you are getting at, Mrs. Ricker. I'd give that," Sam dangled out his right hand, "to know what any one of you was getting at. You, for instance, know that Danny did not kill her sister. I think that Hand knows that John didn't do it—maybe not. I'm beginning to suspect him of honesty in this; but a damn mistaken honesty, at that. I think that John knows that Chad is as innocent as—as—a new born babe, as Mary says. I think Danny would have to be pretty hard put to it, before she'd invent that story about my pipe ashes—"

"Dad," John said, and high time he was saying something, "Dan didn't invent any story. I know that she was clear off about the pipe ashes, and I think she shouldn't have made such a mistake. Since they couldn't have been there, she couldn't have seen them. But Danny doesn't lie. She thought she saw the ashes there, or she would not have said so."

"All right, Son," Sam conceded. "I'd a heap rather think that than not. But, see here, did anyone else think they saw my pipe ashes around there?"

I looked into my own blue voile lap. I imagined I could feel Hubert Hand's eyes boring into me. My face burned. I could feel the waves of red going up into my scalp and spreading out around my ears. I prayed a quick, private prayer to the Lord. But I have learned, through the years, that trying to instruct the Lord, through the pretense of prayer, is a supreme impudence that he usually punishes pretty pretty promptly. My face burned hotter than ever. I raised my eyes. Sam was staring straight at me.

"Mary," he said, "you found the body. Did you see pipe ashes there, then?"

My only excuse is, that it takes longer than a minute or two minutes to betray a person who has been your best friend for twenty-five years.

I said, "No."

"I am going to ask you to swear to that. Somebody get the Bible."

Nobody moved.

"You haven't made any of the others swear to anything," I said.

"I haven't caught any of the others in what I was sure was a direct and deliberate lie."

I felt weaker than filtered water. It is one thing to tell a lie, off hand into the free air. I haven't much use for a person who can't do that, when absolutely necessary. It is another thing to put your hand on the Good Book and swear to a lie. I knew that I could not do it.

"Martha," Sam said, "run and get the Bible."

Martha seemed to be sound asleep again. I did not notice anything queer about her appearance. Mrs. Ricker must have noticed something queer. She jumped to her feet and dashed across the room to where Martha was lying. A shriek went piercing through the house, splintering the air into quivering bits of agony.

Everyone has wakened from sleep, cold with the sweating terror of some hideous nightmare, but with only the vaguest impressions of its detail. So it is with me, and that nightmare hour. I cannot reconstruct it. It remains, yet, in my mind as nothing but a horror of confusions.

We all ran about. I know that there was telephoning. That some of us made desperate attempts with restoratives. I remember Sam's crying, with his face uncovered, like a child. I can hear him saying that he had given her the sleeping powder, had forced it upon her. I can hear, plainest of all, Mrs. Ricker's voice, with all the pent up passions of years breaking forth in torrents of heart-break.

"My baby. My baby girl. My darling. Mother's life. Mother's heart. Speak to mother. My lamb. My baby—"

Her voice again, but cruel now, as she shrieks at Hubert Hand. "Stand there, you beast! Stand there, dry eyed and look at your dead daughter. The child you deserted. The child you ignored—"

I remember the feeling of the fresh air as I walked beside Sam, who was carrying Martha, out of the house. I think that it was John who explained to me that we were going to meet the doctor, who had left Telko to meet us on the road, in order to save time. We must have walked slowly, but I can not rid myself of the impression of Mrs. Ricker, running, running beside us. I remember her scream, when —oh, futile, unnecessary horror—Sam stumbled with his burden as he went to step into the sedan.

As the car went dashing away. I remember looking out of its windows at the house —the great structure, with its wide expanses and its towers; and it seemed to me that it looked like some huge monster, crouching there in the green; some grim, horrible monster, waiting for its victim. Three of us had been caught in its clutches. Were any of us to escape?

CHAPTER XXXII

A PART OF THE PAST

THE doctor, who was younger and more cruel than even a doctor has a right to be, said that Martha had died from a stoppage of the heart, undoubtedly induced by the strong drug in the sleeping powder which had been administered. In other words, Sam had killed her. He loved her. How deeply he had loved her, none of us had ever had sense enough to realize.

We had her funeral, and Chad's, two days later. They were buried in the second grove of aspen trees, two miles beyond the cabin. All the people in the valley came. At first, I thought that they had come to honor the dead, and Sam. But, as I stood by the graves, and watched the faces about me, faces that held suspicion, horror, curiosity; sly faces, cruel faces, eager faces, I did not care to think why most of them had come.

Sam noticed it, too. For, though I had not said a word to him, as we walked home from the graves, he said to me, "Don't blame them Mary. What else could we expect? Decency breeds decency, and—filth draws filth."

There were only four of us around the table that evening. Mrs. Ricker had gone straight to her room, after the funeral. Danny, with no protest from Sam, had left the day before to take Gaby's body to San Francisco. It had seemed heartless to allow her to go alone; but I could not be spared, and there was no one else to go with her. John might have gone; but Danny refused to allow him to, saying, unselfishly, that Sam needed him more than she needed him.

"You people," Hubert Hand spoke suddenly, to John and Sam and me, as we sat there, looking at a supper that nobody pretended to eat, "have been awfully decent about not asking questions since the other afternoon."

"I'm done with questions," Sam said. "Through. Finished."

"Just the same," Hubert Hand replied, "there are a lot of answers that are going to have to be given, sooner or later. You heard Mrs. Ricker say that I was Martha's father—"

"Never mind that, now, Hand," Sam interrupted. "I've known, since the first week you came to the ranch that there was, or had been, something between you two. You'd been her lover, I suppose. Well—men do. That's all. I never went around thinking you, nor any man, was a plaster saint. I reckon you deserted her, eh? And treated her like hell, generally. And she found a refuge here. And, later, probably, heard that you were in trouble, and sent you a letter and told you to come here. Put you wise about the chess racket. Helped you. Made a refuge for you. Women do.

"I suppose she slipped poor Martha in, in place of the child she'd got from the orphanage—used the same papers. Well —to keep on repeating myself, mothers do. You and she have both lived straight and acted decent for the years you've been here. If the two of you want to keep on living in this hell-hole, and keep on straight and acting decent, you'll get the same treatment from me you've always got. If you are Martha's parents, that's more reason, not less, for my not wanting to break up our family here, or make trouble for either one of you."

Hubert Hand pushed back his chair, got up, and walked to the window. "By God, but you're a white man, Sam!" he said. "You're so damn white that you make every one around you look yellow as sulphur by contrast.

"You've got it doped out right about Ollie Ricker and me. She was twelve years older than I was—I always felt like that was kind of an excuse for me. Guess not, though. She was a good enough girl until I came along, just out of prison, and as rotten as two years in prison can make a kid. That's pretty damn rotten. I shouldn't have been sent up, that time. Nothing but a kid's trick—grand row in a dump down on Barbary Coast.

"My mother was dead. My dad was a high-hatter. He went back on me, cold, after that. Found my room locked when I went home. I went back to Ollie. She kept me pretty straight for a while. I ought to have married her, and I know it, before the kid was born. But she was so jealous that she made life a living hell for me. I—well, I wouldn't marry her.

"It was her fault that I got sent up the second time. She talked to a girl friend of hers, and the girl snitched. Up to that time, I think that Ollie Ricker talked more than any living woman. She took a vow, the day they got me, that she'd never speak an unnecessary word again in her life. I'll say she kept that vow pretty well. I wish to God I'd taken the same vow, before I shot my mouth off about John, the other day."

"You don't think that I did it, then?" I wish John could have seemed less eager.

"On the square," Hubert answered, "I don't see who else could have done it. That makes no never minds. I wish I'd kept my mouth shut, on account of Sam—"

"Leave me out of it," Sam growled, "and forget it. Forget the whole damn thing, if you can. I'm through. If I hadn't been so busy playing the fool while Martha was dying, we could likely have saved her. We'll never get any place with this thing. Nobody will. Look at us, messing around with a lot of damn fool clues, and suspicions, telling one lie to cover another—like a batch of gossiping old grannies, while Martha was lying there, dying. And me growling and snarling at her all afternoon. I'm a fool. I'm a damn sight worse—I'm an old fool. A girl got killed on the Desert Moon Ranch. A boy killed himself for love of her. The killer got clean away. So far as I'm concerned, it is going to rest there. I'm closing the book. Soon as I can, I'll sell out the damn place, lock, stock and barrel."

"That doesn't go for me, Dad," John said. "And I think you'll change your mind. I'm not willing to go on the rest of my life with half a dozen people thinking that I killed Gabrielle. No sir, not with one person thinking it. Hubert Hand seems to be in a sort of sentimental mood, right now. How long's he going to stay that way? When he gets over it, what's he going to do with the club he has in his hand? Nothing? Maybe. Depends on how much he might need some cash, sometime in the future."

Hubert said, "I'm no damn blackmailer."

"What did you serve your second term in prison for?"

"None of your business."

"All right."

"No. Hold on, I'll tell you. It's up to me to tell things today, and I'm telling them. It was forgery, all right; but, just the same, I don't feel, yet, like I was much to blame. I'd gotten in with a rotten crowd, and—"

"Never mind. Let it go at that. Here's another thing, Dad. Danny honestly believes that, someway or other, you are mixed up in this thing. We can't marry, with a thing like that between us. I guess it doesn't make any difference in the way we feel toward each other; but it makes a barrier, just the same, that will have to come down before we marry. I haven't talked it over, exactly, with Dan, but I'm dead certain she feels the same way I do about it."

"You think Danny is coming back here, then?" Hubert questioned.

"How do you mean?"

"I'm not looking for her to come back—that's all."

"You're crazy with the heat. They read a telegram to me, not an hour ago, saying that she'd get in on number twenty-one

Friday afternoon. I'm to be at the depot."

"I'll bet she's not on it."

"Say, Hand—"

"Keep your shirt on, John. We all know that Danny is innocent of the crime, and that she is a good little scout—a lot better than Gaby was, if not half as charming and attractive. But—she knows more than she wishes to know. She knows more than she's going to tell. Maybe more than she can tell, in safety. For the love of Mike, folks—couldn't you see that she had some reason for working up that case against Sam? Cutting it out of whole cloth. If she'd been trying to shield John, do you think she'd have used Sam for that purpose? Not on your life she wouldn't have. If she could have, she'd have pinned it on me, or Mrs. Ricker, or even on Mary. She did try to pin it on Chad—"

Mrs. Ricker came tottering into the room. Sam jumped to meet her, and helped her over to his own big chair at the head of the table.

She leaned forward, her long black-sleeved arms stretched straight in front of her over the white cloth, her hands clenched into fists.

"For hours," she said, "I have been trying to reach a decision. I have reached it. I have come here to confess."

CHAPTER XXXIII

ANOTHER CONFESSION

"BEFORE I came to the Desert Moon—" she began, but Hubert Hand stopped her.

"Never mind, Ollie. No need confessing, as you say, any of that. Sam knows all about us. He'd guessed it, or most of it, years ago. I've just now told him the rest. It is all right with him. I mean—he realizes it's all long past. He thinks, as I do, that the best thing we can do is to forget it; and, as he says, keep on living straight and decent."

"Do you know all of our story?" Mrs. Ricker lifted her faded eyes to Sam.

"Enough," Sam sort of sighed it. "I don't care about details. All but—I was kind of wondering what became of the brown-eyed baby, named Vera, who the papers from the orphanage were made out for."

"I found her a home with the mother and father of one of the nurses in the hospital. They thought that she was my own child. They loved her, and were kind to her. Until she died, during the influenza epidemic in San Francisco, in 1918, I sent half of my salary to them each month."

"I always knew you were a good woman," Sam said. "Now what do you say we do forget it, let by-gones be by-gones?"

"No," said Mrs. Ricker. "Martha did not kill Gaby, as you think she did, Sam. I killed her."

Sam dropped his pipe.

There was another one of those dead, awful silences.

"The guilt," Mrs. Ricker went on, 'is entirely mine. All of my life I have been cursed with an abnormal jealousy, and with the violent temper that usually accompanies such jealousy. Martha, you all know, possessed both of these traits—a heritage from her mother—without the balancing power of an adult mind." She turned to Hubert Hand. "Have you told about Nina Ziegelman?"

"No," he spoke sharply. "I wouldn't, Ollie. No need—"

"But I would," she said, and continued, more rapidly. "About four months before Martha was born a woman named Nina Ziegelman betrayed us—Hubert and me. I had given her a confidence, and she betrayed it. When I found out what she had done I went to her hotel room and tried to kill her. I did not succeed. I shot her; but she recovered. For many reasons, of their own, she and her friends preferred no charges against me. I went free. But I had marked Martha for murder. The seed was planted within her. She was powerless against it; as powerless as she would have been against any evil physical inheritance. She can't be blamed. No one could dare blame her for that. It was I, who planted those seeds of violence, jealousy, hatred, and murderous intent, who killed Gabrielle. Martha was only the helpless instrument."

I was sorry that there was eagerness, mixed with the pity in John's voice, as he asked, "Did Martha tell you that she committed the murder?"

"No. Other parental heritages of hers were a lying tongue, and slyness. She persisted in her denials, to me. But it is all so evident.

"Gabrielle joined Martha at the rabbit hut. You know how one sits down on one's heels to peer in at the rabbits in the low hutch. I think Gaby must have been squatting, so, when Martha jumped at her and over-powered her. Martha was strong, you know. Her hands were very strong. You remember, Mary, how she could open fruit jars that neither you nor I could budge? She had hated Gaby ever since Gaby had come. Martha had said to me, dozens of times, that someday she thought that she would kill Gaby.

"The marks on her throat, I thought, and so did the coroner, looked as if she had been caught by someone who had been standing behind her. Seized unawares, it would not take long to strangle a person. Martha must have done it in two or three minutes. She took the bracelet then, rolled the body under the clump of berry bushes, right there, and came straight into the house.

"She showed no feeling of guilt, because she had none. At that moment, we should all have suspected something. We should have known that that girl would not, suddenly, have given Martha the bracelet. Later, she told you about it, didn't she, Sam? And you left Chad in the barn, to hoodwink Robert, and came up and hid the body for her?"

"By God, I did not," Sam said.

"No need to deny it, now Sam," she said. "It was the deed of a good man. Martha was never responsible—but courts might not have understood. Now we will all shield her—keep her secret. Chad's confession will satisfy the world. Danny must know, I suppose; but no one else need ever know—"

"But I tell you—" Sam shouted.

I don't know how, without raising her voice, and she made it sound through his shouting, and silence it, but she did. "Sam—don't. Why can't we be honest, now, among ourselves? You see, I know that both you and Martha were on those stairs when the body was put there—"

My thoughts jumped out into words. "Chad must have known it, too. He must have decided that he'd rather die than betray either Sam or Martha."

"He might have thought it," Sam said, with a lack of emphasis that edged stupidity. "He could not have known it. It is not true."

"Mrs. Ricker," John questioned, "what makes you think that Dad and Martha had both been on the stairs?"

"Sam's pipe ashes were strewn about. And there was an old tatting shuttle, with which I had been trying to teach Martha to tat, that morning. She had it in her pocket. It must have dropped out. I think that Mary tried to clean the pipe ashes away. They were gone when I saw the body the second time. I should have tried to do it, but I didn't think. I had not time. I was frantic with fear.

"Wait," she answered our looks and our exclamations of astonishment. "I will explain. Martha and I, as you know, were alone here in the house while the rest of you were out looking for Gaby. Martha was sleepy. I was worried about her sleeping so much, and tried all sorts of ways to keep her awake until bed time. I kept sending her out to look at the sky, to see whether a storm was coming to spoil her fireworks. She would run out, and right in again, to curl on the davenport and try to sleep. Finally, though, she stayed outside, for a long time. But for Sam's pipe ashes, I would think that then she had managed to drag the body upstairs by herself. Still—though I believe that she did have strength enough to move the body, I do not believe that she would have had wits enough.

"When the wind rose, I looked first to Martha. I called her several times before she answered. Finally she came around the house from the direction of the rabbit hut, again. Surely, you must have noticed, as I did, that she had seemed strangely excited during all the later afternoon and early evening. At the time, I thought it was because she had been given the monkey charm, and because she was to have the fireworks.

"But, when we were alone, she talked very foolishly—even for her. She began with it again, when she had answered my call. She kept insisting that soon we were all going to be surprised about something; something very nice, that had to do with Chad—but she would never, never tell what it was. As a rule, I should not have paid any attention to such talk. But, for some reason, her excitement, and her insistence about a surprise, disturbed me. I spent some minutes quizzing her. I even tried to bribe her. I could get nothing from her but further talk about the nice surprise.

"At last I gave it up, and ran upstairs to begin closing the house against the storm. I thought I'd begin with the attic, and come down through the house. I tried the attic door. It was locked, and the key was missing. I was alarmed. Possibly, because we were all disturbed concerning Gaby's absence; and, possibly, because inside doors are so seldom locked here. I remembered the old skeleton key hanging in the broom closet. I ran down and got it.

"I opened the door. I saw the body. I touched it—and knew, even before I saw the tatting shuttle there, and the beaded bag, covered with Sam's pipe ashes. I snatched the shuttle and hid it in my dress. At that instant, through the open window at the end of the hall, I heard your voices, as you ran up the road from the garage to escape the rain. I shut the door, locked it, and ran downstairs. Do you know, when I met you, I had that key in my hand?

"Mary came up to me to help me close the French windows. I did not think. I had a wild desire to rid myself of that key. I was determined to protect Martha, at any cost. Mary's pocket was hanging like an open bag, right below me. I dropped the key into it. It was a frightful mistake. If I had kept it, and thrown it away, everyone in the house would have been exonerated. It was, as you know, the one link that connected this household with the crime. That is, after Mary had cleaned away the pipe ashes. The little fleck or two of them, which Danny saw, might have fallen there days before—"

"Mary," Sam questioned, "were my pipe ashes on the bag? Did you stop to clean them off, before you gave the alarm?"

"Yes, they were, Sam. Yes, I did."

"Then," Sam said, "whoever put the body there, put the pipe ashes there to throw suspicion on me; and whoever it was, knew my habits, too. He must have put the tatting shuttle there, as well, for good measure. Does anyone of you think that Martha would have had the wits to save ashes out of my pipe and put them on the bag? I tell you, that would take an amount of logic, of reasoning, that Martha could no more have managed than a kitten could."

"Chad!" John almost sang it, in his eagerness. "He was wise enough, and fool enough. His one idea was to protect Martha. He helped her get the body up there, between seven and eight o'clock, and he put the ashes there to shield her. I said fool enough. But, come to think of it, he knew what he was doing. He was protecting her with the one person in the house who could not have done it; with the one person that no Nevada jury would convict. Then, he turned around, shielded Dad with his death and his written confession. From start to finish, it works out, plain as day. Gosh! Say—it is terrible. Gosh—horrible! Think of it— But, thank God, it is cleared up, anyway."

"'Cleared up, anyway' is right," Sam said, and looked around at all of us, pityingly, like he'd look at a litter of sickly puppies.

CHAPTER XXXIV

DEFENSE

"ALL satisfied, then?" Sam questioned. "All satisfied that Martha killed her, and that Chad carried the body upstairs and hid it for her, and left the false clues—including the tatting shuttle, for reasons unknown—and came down, merry and happy enough, until he took a sudden notion to write a false confession and walk out and shoot himself through the head?"

I was satisfied; but I felt like a fool for so being, when Sam put it like that. I said nothing.

Hubert Hand said, "It looks like a pretty clear case, Sam."

"Does? What's become of your clear case against John, unchanged tires, and everything?"

"I had not heard Ollie's story, then."

"Dad," there was pleading in John's voice, "you don't mean to say that you can't see the thing? That you aren't satisfied with this absolutely logical explanation?"

"Yes," Sam answered, with his most dangerous drawl, "that's what I mean to say. It takes more, or seems to, to satisfy me than it takes to satisfy some folks. Satisfied? Not by a damn sight!"

John lost his temper. "For the love of Pete, why aren't you? What would satisfy you? Say? What are you trying to do?

Do you like the case against me so well that you can't give it up? You made us all come clean the other day, or tried to. Come clean yourself, now? What have you got up your sleeve?"

"I've got a couple of good fighting arms up my sleeve." Sam answered. "And I've got a daughter, dead, in a grave up there. Since she was knee high to a duck, she's counted on me, for food, and shelter, and protection generally. I don't know—but I reckon she may still be counting on me, somewhere not too far away, for protection. She is going to have it."

Mrs. Ricker began to cry, quietly; but Sam saw her.

"No, no, Mrs. Ricker," he said, "don't get me wrong in this. You believe that she was guilty. I believe that she is innocent. Believing that way, it is my bounden duty to clear her name. It is my fault that she isn't here to stand up for herself. It is my fault, too, I guess, that I've raised John so that he won't stand up for his own women-folks—"

"That's rotten of you, Dad. It is unfair. I'd stand up for Martha till the cows came home. But what's the use of bucking straight facts?"

"Damn your straight facts. We haven't got any. I've a few straight fact questions, though, that will blow this story galley-west. Here's one of them:

"Does it stand to reason that, for two months, Gaby lived right here unharmed by Martha? But that, on the very day, when she feared death from some outside enemy, Martha should kill her?"

"It is coincidental," John admitted. "But, just the same, there are lots of coincidences. We all meet them, all the time."

"It wasn't a coincidence that Gaby was afraid of meeting, when she walked out of this house on the Fourth of July. Here's another question.

"Mrs. Ricker, she says, was plumb convinced that Martha committed the murder, and that I aided her by carrying the body upstairs afterwards. She thought this the night of the murder, and the next day, and ever since. Why, then, didn't she come to me and, anyway, put out a feeler or two in my direction. She knew that I'd go as far to save Martha as she would go. I wouldn't protect John, nor any other person on this place; but Martha was a child—younger, even, than a child in some ways. Mrs. Ricker knew that I'd save Martha with my last dollar, and, as somebody said the other day, with my last lie. Mrs. Ricker and I were alone together for more than half an hour the morning of the fifth. Why didn't she give me a hint, then, of any of this?"

"I—I was afraid," Mrs. Ricker answered. "I was waiting. I thought that you would give me the hint—the sign. I was not sure—"

"Not sure then, but sure now?"

"I tell you," Mrs. Ricker flared up, "I was afraid. So long as she was living, I was afraid of everything—of everyone. I was afraid of myself. I dared not think; I dared not look. I scarcely lifted my eyes from my tatting. I—I was afraid."

"Now, now," Sam said. "I see your point in that, especially since talking had got you in bad once. But—see here. I said a while ago that I'd always known you were a good woman. Well, I am going to keep on knowing it, for the present. There are enough folks around here to jump at conclusions without me doing it. But, you, thinking as you say you think, directly accused Danny the other day. That was not the act of a good woman—"

"God, Ollie!" Hubert Hand burst out, "He is going to try to pin it on you, to save Martha and the Stanley name—even yet."

"You," Sam said, "are a liar."

"Safe enough. I wouldn't fight you, and you know it, old man."

Sam jumped to his feet. I had to stumble over John, but I managed to reach Sam first, and to stand in front of him. "Boys, boys," I begged. "Not here. Not in this house tonight. Remember—"

Hubert stuck his hands in his pockets and walked away. Sam dropped into his chair. The telephone bell, in the other room, began to ring.

CHAPTER XXXV

A VISITOR

HUBERT answered the telephone, and called to Sam. I followed him into the living-room to hear what was to be heard. I think that John and Mrs. Ricker followed for the same reason.

When Sam said, "Read it, please," I knew that it was another telegram. They telephone all of our telegrams to us from Rattail, and mail them later, when they get around to it, if they don't forget.

We had been pestered nearly crazy with telegrams, on account of all the rucus Sam had stirred up about Canneziano, on the night of the murder. I supposed this would be another one of them, about some poor Indian or other who had been found at a desert water-hole. But, almost right away, I could tell from Sam's answers that this was about something different. He kept writing things on the telephone pad, and asking central to repeat, and to repeat, again, and to spell that, please. Lands, but I got nervous, before he finally hung up the receiver, and turned to us, and asked:

"Any of you ever hear of a fellow named Lynn MacDonald?"

None of us, of course, ever had.

"Seems he is a kind of detective," Sam explained. "He calls himself a crime analyst, and he specializes in murder cases. Works on his own hook, kind of like Sherlock Holmes did, I guess. He had a list of references, and past cases, long as your arm. They sounded fine. I forget them now. Anyway, he made a straight proposition. He wants to come here and take the case. He wants his expenses, and nothing else, if he fails. If he succeeds, he wants ten thousand, cash. Poor fish. I'd have paid twenty thousand just as quick. Anyway, that's a fair proposition. It is the way I am used to trading; money down if I deliver, nothing if I don't. I'm going to wire him to come."

"Dad," John objected, "you don't know a thing about this guy, except what he tells you. If you have to drag a detective into this, now, after what Mrs. Ricker has told us, why don't you wire to a reputable agency, and have it send someone?"

"I like the tune this fellow sings. I like the straight way he made his proposition. When I wanted the best doctors for Martha, I always got specialists, didn't I? Well, this fellow's a specialist. His references were damn good. I like his name. An honest Scotchman comes pretty close to being the noblest work of God.

"Let's see—Danny is coming up on Friday afternoon, isn't she? I'll wire MacDonald to take the same train. That will save us two trips to Rattail in the heat."

"Dad—sleep over it," John urged.

I hated the quick, sharp way both Sam and Hubert Hand looked at him. I hated him noticing it, and jumping right into an explanation.

"If Mrs. Ricker is right about all this," he said, "and I swear that I think she is, isn't it enough for us to know about it, Dad? If you get a detective here, and he comes to the same conclusion, we can't keep it a secret, then."

Sam said, "He won't. And we aren't wanting, nor needing, any secrets on the Desert Moon, just now."

He sat down and began to write the telegram. Five minutes, and he was reading it to the operator at Rattail. He had just hung up the telephone receiver when the doorbell rang, a long, impudent ring.

Nobody, I thought as I went to the door, with any sense of decency would ring our bell, like that, on this evening.

I was right. For a minute I did not recognize the man standing there on the porch. In the next minute I did recognize him. My heart stood stock still. He was Daniel Canneziano.

CHAPTER XXXVI

CANNEZIANO

HE PUSHED right past me, into the room, without waiting for an invitation. He always was a polished-up, perfumed little fellow, but that evening, what with his gray spats and a cane, he was right-down dandified.

"Got a chap to drive me up from Rattail," he said. "Beastly things, these Ford cars. What?"

He gave that explanation of how he had got up from Rattail, as if it were the only thing any of us could possibly be wondering about him, or wanting to know.

"I left my trunk down there," he went on, taking off his light gray overcoat, and brushing it, and folding it across his valise that he had set on a chair. "The Ford chap couldn't bring it. I thought you could send a truck down for it, tomorrow, Sam."

"Counting on paying us quite a visit, eh, Canneziano?" Sam found his voice at last. "Trunk and everything."

"As a matter of fact," Canneziano answered, siting down and making himself comfortable on the small davenport, "all that mess you stirred up about me, on the night of the murder, makes traveling not altogether agreeable for the present. Yes, I think that, all things considered, that having me for a guest, after having set all the police in the country on my trail, keeping me safely here, as it were, is about the least you can do, isn't it?"

"I reckon I could do a little less, in a pinch," Sam drawled. "But, all things considered, as you say—though it might be you and I aren't considering the same things—I'm glad to see you here. Make yourself right at home, for you may be going to stay even longer than you planned."

"Righto! However, if you have some neat little scheme of trying to pin the murder on me, I'd advise you to abandon it. If I hadn't had water-tight alibis, all along the line—"

"Keep your water-tight alibis in a dry place till you need them," Sam advised. "Maybe you will need them. We've got a crime analyst, specialist in murder cases, coming up here Friday. You can give your alibis to him."

"That crime analyst sounds like Lynn MacDonald. That's what she calls herself."

"She!" Sam said.

"If you've got Lynn MacDonald, you've got a woman."

"Hell!" Sam exploded.

"Just the same," Canneziano said, "she's the best dic on the coast. Some say that she is the best in this country. Not that I give a hang. But, this is inside dope, if anybody can find who killed Gaby, this MacDonald woman can. You should hear some of the San Quentin boys compliment her—in their way."

"We don't want a woman. Better wire her not to come, Dad," John urged.

This time it was Canneziano who looked quickly and sharply at John. "You're dead right you had," he said, "if you don't want the murderer discovered."

"Sam," Hubert Hand suggested, "you'd better wire and verify her references, anyway."

Canneziano laughed. "I see what you are getting at. I take it you've all gotten pretty jumpy around here, these last few days. Can't see the woodpile for the niggers. Now this gentleman—by the way, Sam, you are forgetting your manners; I have not, as yet, met any of your guests—thinks that this coming dic may be a pal of mine—something of the sort. If that were the case, what good would it do to verify her references, by wire? The people you wired to would all answer that Lynn MacDonald was honest, capable, and so forth. She's got a reputation around the bay that is hard to beat. But, if this were a plant, Jane Jones or Amaryllis De Vere could come along, just the same, posing as Lynn MacDonald. If you are really concerned about it, why not have a Burns man bring her up? You shouldn't mind the extra expense, Sam."

"There's generally more than one way to skin a cat," Sam said, "beside the way you are told to do it."

Leaving us to think that over, he went to the telephone and called the office of the *Morning Record*, at Telko, and for Mr. Clarence Pette.

When he finally got him, he asked him whether he knew Lynn MacDonald. Evidently he said that he knew who she was, for Sam told him to take number twenty-one at Telko, Friday afternoon, and to meet him here, and he would pay him fifty dollars for his trouble.

"Pretty work, Sam," Canneziano approved. "Too bad I got you all so rattled. As a matter of fact, I rather fancy myself in the role of a sleuth. If Lynn MacDonald weren't coming, I'd like to take a try at this job myself. For instance, I noticed that, though Dan is in 'Frisco now—according to the papers—none of you suggested that she meet Lynn MacDonald, have her identified, and bring her back here with her. I am trying to decide whether that means that you don't trust the gentle Dan, or whether, though the newspapers say she is to return at once to her home in Nevada, you do not expect her to return."

"It means neither," John snapped.

"Mr. Canneziano," I said, "this is John Stanley, Sam's foster-son. He and Danny are engaged to be married. This other gentleman is Mr. Hubert Hand, and the lady is Mrs. Ricker."

Things felt real polite, for a minute, as they always do just after folks have been introduced.

"Bad times you have been having around here, lately," Canneziano said, pleasantly, as if he were talking about the weather.

Mrs. Ricker turned and went upstairs.

CHAPTER XXXVII

STRANGLER BAUERMONT

SAM spoke directly to Canneziano. "Did you ever know a man named Bauermont—Lewis Bauermont?"

"Strangler Bauermont? Very well indeed. Has he anything to do with it?"

"What's that you called him?" Sam asked, sharply.

"Strangler Bauermont, you mean?"

I remembered that Danny had told me his nickname was "Mexico."

Sam said, "That's what I mean. How did he come by a name like that?"

"He is by way of being a wrestler, I believe; and won the name for some particularly clever hold that brought his man down every time. I have never gone in for that sort of thing—scientific details. He was a jiu-jitsu expert, also. Oh, no, no," as he noticed our quickening interests. "He is a continent and an ocean away, at present. Moreover, murder is quite outside his line—quite."

"You are sure he is in Europe, now?" Sam questioned.

"I had a letter from him, only a few days ago, written and sent from Deauville."

"I suppose," Sam mused, "that he could easily teach his strangling trick to another man."

"Undoubtedly. But isn't the entire connection rather foolish, when one stops to think that Strangler has been, for years, badly smitten with the lady?"

"I guess he got over that," Sam said. "Seems, now, as if he was anxious to be shed of her."

"Oh-ho! And he famous for his constancy to the Gaby. Nine, ten, I don't know how many years. However, though I'll grant his name belies it, he was a smooth, diplomatic cuss. I think you can be practically certain that he would draw the line at murder—under any circumstances."

"Could you read a letter written in his code?"

"If you have a Spanish dictionary."

"There was nothing Spanish about this one. It was just a jumble of letters."

"I don't know it then. I'm rather clever with codes, however. I fancy I could decipher it, with a bit of study."

Sam asked, "Where were you, do you know, at the time of the Tonopah train robbery, three years ago? You were here, right shortly after that, I seem to remember."

"I stopped for a friendly visit, and you kicked me out, and into my downfall at 'Frisco. My three years in the big house are at your door. But I hold no grudge."

"What I want to know is, where were you at the time of the train robbery?"

"I was in Denver, since you insist."

"Was this strangler fellow there with you?"

"He was. Pardon my curiosity, but is this leading to something?"

"I don't know. Do you? This strangler friend of yours told the girls that you and he robbed that train."

Canneziano's face went dark and ugly. "So the girls say, ugh?"

"He told them that," John said. There was threat enough in his voice to make Canneziano come off his perch.

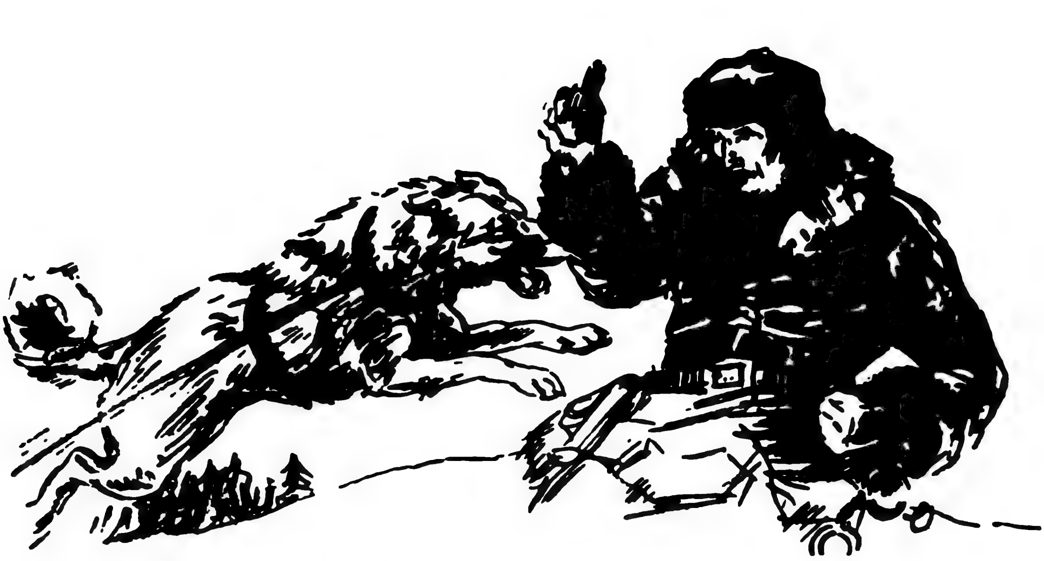
"Is that possible?" he questioned, but pleasantly enough. "I can't see his motive. As a matter of fact, when we read the account of how easily the thing had been pulled off, we did rather regret that we had not taken a try at it ourselves."

"We think he has denied it, since," Sam said. "We think that the code letter, which none of us can read, is his denial. No matter. Your story tots up straight enough with the one we have."

"Gratifying, I am sure. I wonder whether I might see this code letter? As I've remarked—I've a beastly habit of bragging, I hope you don't mind—I am rather clever with the things."

I went upstairs to get it. I am not denying that it gave me the creeps to go into Gaby's room, alone at night. When I opened the door, saw that the light was lit, and that someone was standing beside it, I all but jumped out of my shoes.

In the following chapters Danny returns to the ranch; and with her comes forceful Lynn MacDonald, to set in motion the reluctant wheels of justice.



SEWELL PEASLEE WRIGHT

tells a Tale of Grim Justice in the Frozen North

CORNERED

VERY cautiously the man crept up the edge of the shallow ravine, keeping a clump of snow-ladened spruces between himself and his quarry.

In the ravine a man was hastily preparing a meal over a clear-burning little fire built on a rock, scraped clear of snow. Rice and meat sputtered in the pan, and the water in the blackened tin bucket over the fire was beginning to steam. A team of five sullen huskies squatted in their harness, eager and intent.

The watcher was Cal Edwards, of the Mounted. The man in the ravine was Shorty Wentz, wanted in three provinces, and the man Edwards had been trailing for nearly a month.

That morning he had come upon the outlaw's breakfast fire only two or three miles from where he had cooked his own morning meal, and now the end of the trail was in sight.

Carefully Edwards stood up, his service revolver drawn and ready.

"Put 'em up, Shorty!" he called sharply.

Crouching low, Wentz whirled and his hand streaked for his gun. Edwards' revolver cracked instantly, and the outlaw's gun flew from his hand, burying itself in the snow. Snarling, Wentz raised his open hands shoulder high.

"That's better," commended Edwards. "Now keep them there, or the next time I'll shoot closer home."

Keeping his eyes on his man, Edwards started the descent into the ravine. The bank was not steep, and the distance was only a matter of twenty or thirty feet, and Edwards reached the bottom without mishap.

"What the hell's the idea?" growled Shorty. "Who do you think you are, anyway?"

"Name's Edwards. Got a job of bringing you in for killing Les Harding. Let you look at the papers as soon as I slip these irons on you."

Edwards reached into a pocket with his left hand, taking a step towards his prisoner as he did so. There was a deep-throated growl, and the lead huskey, a savage, one-eyed brute, leaped the length of his trace, straight for the policeman's throat.

Instinctively Edwards threw up his right arm to protect himself from the gleaming fangs, cursing himself for approaching the team so closely.

The brute's fangs closed on the thick fur of Edward's parka, and with a wrench he tore himself free. It had all happened in a split second, but it had been enough for Wentz, rendered desperate by his plight.

The instant the gun wavered, Wentz sprang. He was only a few feet away and with one leap he was upon his captor.

Just as Edwards tore free from the huskey's fangs, the flying body of the outlaw hurtled against the policeman. Edwards, thrown off balance by the huskey's unexpected attack, stumbled in the clogging snow, and fell backward.

He fired twice as he was falling, the bullets flying wild, and the two men struck the snow in a flailing heap. The policeman fought like a demon, but Wentz had the advantage. Edwards was of barely average height, while Wentz was over six feet, and thirty pounds heavier than his antagonist.

Over and over they rolled in the snow, muscles straining until they fairly crackled, eyes blazing with the blood-lust that pours through the veins of men when they fight for life itself. The dogs were yapping and growling excitedly, entangling themselves in their harness, but the two men grappling in the snow fought in grim silence, save for their harsh breathing and now and then an agonized grunt of pain as some shrewd blow took effect. Their breath hovered above them in the frigid air in a steamy cloud.

Edwards felt himself weakening before the savage, relentless strength of the outlaw. The terrific, merciless drains he had made on his vitality since he had lost the trail in the storm were beginning to tell on him. Wentz sensed something of this, and a savage light flared in his piggy blue eyes.

With a sudden rush of energy he succeeded at last in wresting the revolver from the policeman's hand. Gripping the heavy weapon by its handle, he struck Edwards a sharp, sweeping blow just over the ear.

The frame and cylinder crashed with a crunching thud against flesh and bone, and with a quick intake of breath, the policeman went limp, relaxing in the snow.

IT WAS nearly an hour before Edwards regained consciousness. His head throbbed with stabbing pain, and his hands were manacled with his own irons. Dully he wondered why Wentz had not finished the job at once. The policeman knew perfectly well that Wentz would not leave him alive—and that to expect help from an outside source was utterly useless.

There was in all probability not a living soul within a hundred miles.

"Come around, have you?" sneered Wentz, who had been watching. "How's the head feelin'?"

"Not so good," said Edwards quietly. "Why didn't you bump me off when you had the chance?"

"Plenty of chance left," chuckled Wentz. "Don't worry about that part of it, either. You'll get yours plenty before long. But first—I want some information."

"Such as what?"

"I want to know where we are!" said Wentz savagely. "That damned storm fixed me, somehow. Kept right on going, to throw you off the track. Don't know this country, anyway. In a way, I'm lost, and I want you to put me wise."

"So?" asked Edwards softly.

"Yes! I got your map, hopin' I'd find some marks on it or somethin' that would help, but there ain't a damn thing. Now, my pretty little policeman, you take this map and locate us—and no funny business, either. I know enough about things to catch you if you try to lie to me."

"I won't lie to you," said Edwards, his voice quiet and very calm.

"Good! Where are we, then?"

"That's something else again. You'll never know from me, Shorty. I'd see us both in hell before I'd help you out of your jam. Better shoot and be on your way, if that's what you're waiting for!"

The outlaw's face fell. Without the information Edwards was withholding he might travel for weeks—until his provisions gave out—and still be in the trackless bush. Of course, he could strike south, and hit the railroad, in time, but they'd be looking for him there. No, he must have the information. His piggish eyes squinted calculatingly.

"There's ways of making people talk," he said ominously. "If you won't talk one way, you'll talk another."

Wentz busied himself with the fire, piling on fuel until the flames leaped high. Edwards' face went a little white as he watched. He could guess what was coming. He had not lived all his life in an Indian country without hearing stories of torture.

Wentz turned to his prisoner.

"Will you mark that map now—or will I have to toast your toes for you?" he asked grimly. "I warn you, I'll burn the feet clean off of you, and keep on burnin' until you loosen up. What do you say?"

Edwards studied the man for a moment.

"Go to hell!" he said distinctly.

"You'll think you're there in a minute!" snapped Wentz. He dragged his manacled prisoner close to the fire, and elevated Edwards' feet so that they rested on the rock upon which the fire was burning, sitting on his prisoner's legs, so that the policeman could not struggle free.

Almost instantly the heat struck though the light pacs, and the heavy woolen socks began to grow hot. The stench of the smoking leather filled the air. The socks felt as though they were soft, red-hot coals. Edwards felt his toes curling and writhing in agony and the sweat broke out on his forehead. Wentz, an evil leer on his face, watched intently.

"Ready to talk?" he asked, as a trickle of sweat rolled suddenly down Edwards' pale cheek. "Or do you want some more?"

For a moment Edwards was tempted. He was not particularly afraid of death, for he had faced it too many times. But this—this was worse than death. He had failed in the task that had been set him, and was ready to pay with his life. But to pay with this exquisite torture, this worse than death, this hell on earth.

If he only had some means of escaping from the torture! Then he could do his full duty. His tortured brain raced frantically searching for an avenue of escape.

There must be some way out. There always is, if you can think hard enough and fast enough. Some way out—a fragment of an old Indian tale flashed into his mind; a desperate plan crystalized in his mind.

His heart gave a sudden throb; if only the plan would work!

"God!" he gasped. "Stop it; stop it!"

"I thought you'd listen to reason," grinned Wentz. He swung Edwards around, and buried the tortured feet in the snow. The parched leather hissed and crackled.

"That's better," gasped Edwards. "That's—that's more than human nerves can stand. I'll tell you, straight—if you'll let me go free afterwards."

For a barely perceptible instant Wentz hesitated.

"All right; it's a bargain," he said with a crafty smile.

EDWARDS knew the man lied. One look at the outlaw's face was sufficient to prove that. But a broken word meant nothing to Wentz. He had no intention of keeping his end of the bargain.

"Give me the map," commanded Edwards.

Wentz pulled out the map, unfolded it, and placed it in the policeman's manacled hands.

Edwards studied the map a moment, to get his bearings. It covered a lot of territory, and had been made after a hasty and entirely inefficient survey, like all the maps of the far north.

"Well, here's Circle Lake. You cut across right here, dodging the fishing camps and the trappers. Here's Pine Point, and up here's Locke River. Now here's where I was when the storm came along. After the storm I circled until I picked up your trail, and then—"

"Draw that on the map with a pencil," interrupted Wentz. "I can't remember all this."

Inwardly, Edwards smiled. It was just what he had hoped for.

"Take these irons off of me, then," he said. "I can't do anything with them on."

Wentz hesitated a moment, and then drew the key from his pocket.

"Just one funny move, and I'll drill you," he said as he unlocked the manacles. His gun was ready, and trained on Edwards' breast. "Got a pencil?"

Edwards nodded and reached up under his parka.

It took him some time to locate what he was looking for, but at last he drew forth a small, rectangular pasteboard box.

"What's that?" asked Wentz with sudden suspicion.

"This is a mechanical pencil," explained Edwards calmly. "You carry the extra leads in a box." Carefully he opened the box, and tapped the contents out on his palm, Wentz watching every movement.

As the contents of the box struck the policeman's palm, he made a sudden movement towards his mouth, but not before Wentz saw what had been in the little box; a large tablet, pale green in color. Before Wentz could do more than utter a sharp cry of protest, Edwards put the tablet in his mouth, and swallowed it.

"What was that?" snapped Wentz. "You lied to me about the extra leads, you——!"

"Not at all. I said the extra leads were carried in a box, and they are, but not in this box."

"What was it, then? Tell me, or I'll blow your head off, you damn meddlesome Mountie!"

With a wild laugh, Edwards rose to his feet.

"Too late, you fool!" he cried mockingly.

"In my business there is always danger of an accident, out in the bush—an accident that means slow, sure death. That's why— Ah-h-h-h-h!" He clutched at his middle, his face writhing.

"Poison!" Wentz understood at last. "Tell me the rest—about that map!" he roared. "I'll toast your feet again; I'll burn your guts out with live coals—show me, I tell you!"

Laughing shrilly, Edwards swayed in his tracks.

"Too late!" he repeated. "Too late! Find your own way, now! You'd have killed me anyway, after I'd told you. I held the last trump after all, Shorty!"

With staring eyes Wentz watched his prisoner. Despite the hardness of the man, his face drained slowly white. He had seen wolves die with strychnine twisting them into knots, and laughed as he thought of the bounty and the beauty of the pelt, but this was different.

Agonized sweat poured from the policeman, and his face was twisted and drawn so that it seemed scarcely human, and all the time his long fingers tore like talons at his stomach.

"The last—trump—Shorty!" he gasped, and a pale smile shone for a moment upon his white and tortured lips. "The—last—trump!" With a choked scream he started to run, staggered, and fell face downwards into a bank of drifted snow. For a moment he twitched, and then one leg drew up under his body, and he was suddenly very quiet.

THAT night Wentz made camp in the lee of a huge boulder. He felt strangely elated, knowing that at last his trail was unfollowed, yet oddly unnerved by the events of the day. It had been a horrible thing to see the policeman die, much as he hated Edwards, and all his breed.

Wentz was just arranging his sleeping robe, when a voice spoke from the shadows.

"Put 'em up, Shorty!" It was the second time that day Wentz had heard the words—*and in the same voice!*

His face went suddenly white, and his piggish eyes bulged hideously in their sockets.

"The Mountie!" he gasped, and his trembling hands fluttered above his head.

"No other," said Edwards cheerily, approaching his prisoner. "This time I think everything'll go all right. There! Those wrist irons look much better on your hands, Shorty. In the morning, bright and early, we're starting back. The last trump is the one that counts!"

"But—but—" gasped Shorty.

"You don't understand how I can have died back there in the snow, and still be alive, I imagine," chuckled Edwards. "I don't blame you—and I thank you for your compliment, although it isn't intended as such.

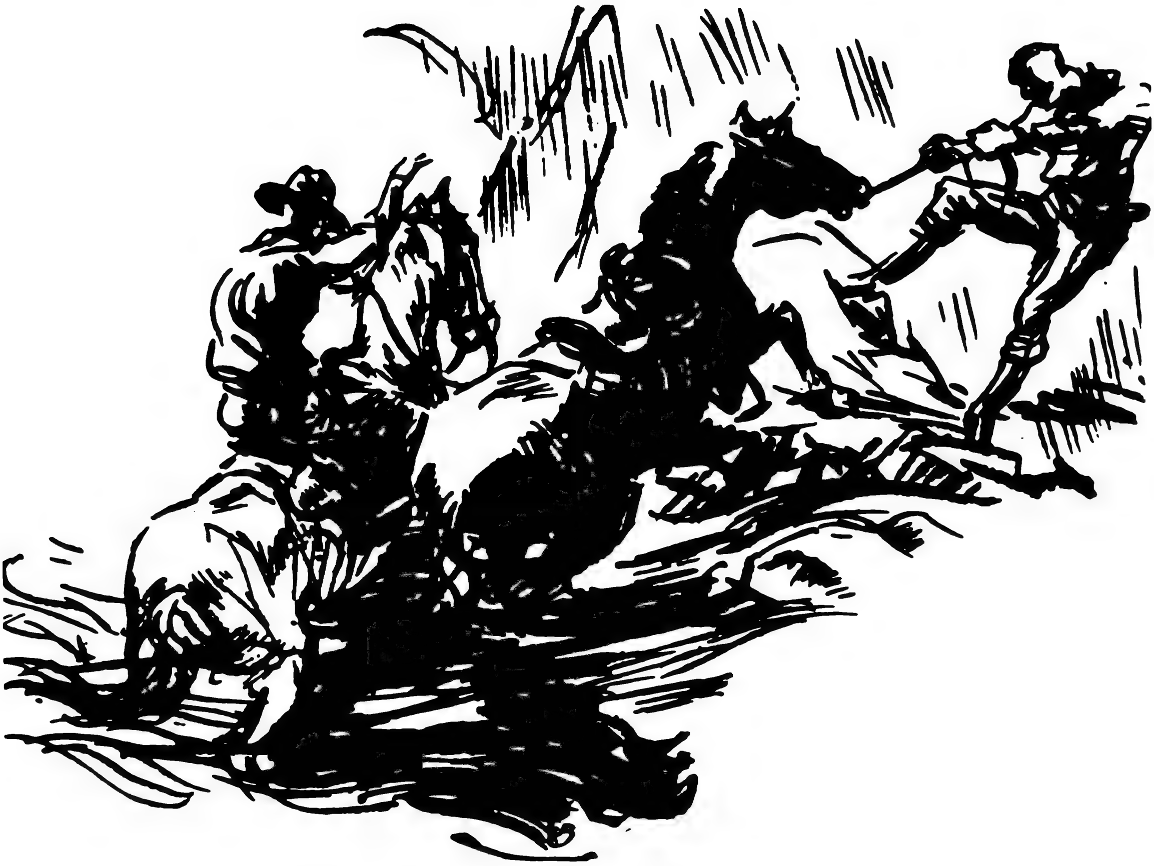
"I was in a tight pinch, and an old Indian yarn came into my head. Something about a buck condemned to death by the tribe. He escaped, and in clear view of the whole outfit, apparently stuck a knife into himself, and then reeled over the edge of the cliff into the river. It was all faked, and the buck met his girl a few months later, and everything went fine.

"The heat was getting more than I could stand, and yet I didn't want to give you the help that you'd receive from the information you wanted on the map. So I faked the poison scene—I've seen men die often enough so I know how they look—and you fell for it beautifully, Shorty.

"After you got well out of sight I picked up and followed, slowly, for my feet are in terrible shape, keeping a safe distance behind, leaving my dogs. I knew I'd get you tonight when you made camp, and—*I did!*"

"But—there was a pill! I saw it. A green pill," said Wentz with an oath. "That's what fooled me."

"Yes, there was a pill," said Edwards with a quiet little smile. "A compound of acetanilid and caffein. I have splitting headaches once in a while, and always carry one or two of these tablets with me. They're very good. I recommend them to you highly, Shorty—for you'll be getting an awful headache if you don't calm down a bit!"



CHAPTER I

A QUIET PLACE TO TELL A SECRET

BEFORE the Big Cedars National Park Hotel a lean young man, by name Pete Scanlan, stood at the heads of two restive horses. He was waiting for Raymond Fletcher, a client from New York, who had made a date with him by telegram; and here came Fletcher now, on the tick of the appointed time.

Warm greetings over (for this was not the first time that Pete had acted as guide in the West for Fletcher), they set off. Riding up the trail south of the hotel, they left the motor-road and climbed at once into profound green tranquillity.

Raymond produced a cigarette and then, eyes upon his horse to be ready lest it was timid of the sudden flash of a match, lit up and blew smoke. A coil of it wavered ahead to Pete, who turned in the saddle, hand on cantle.

"Now that's a new odor to me," he remarked. "A man whiffs a heap of kinds, riding herd on tourists from all over the world, to say nothing of America; but that is sure a new one on me. Wherever does that tobacco come from?"

"Algiers," replied Raymond. "Here you are," and he tossed his cigarette-case, which the guide adroitly caught.

Having taken out a cigarette of the new odor to him he threw the case back, Raymond's horse flinging its head to one side nervously.

"Gee, I wish I could travel!" exclaimed Pete, and puffed the smoke of his first Algerian cigarette. "What was you doing in Algiers?"

"Just looking at it on the way from Madrid," replied Raymond. "I would have stayed longer, but I was in a hurry to get here and see you."

"To see me!" said Pete.

"Yes. I'm here with a definite object. It's a big thing. I want your help."

They rode out of the forest among willow-herb tufts and then into a place of scattered bowlders.

"We can talk up here," said Raymond, looking over the grand expanse beyond them, and edging his horse level with Pete's. "I want to read something to you. Do you know Spanish?"

"A mite. I know the Spanish that a

The Golden Burros

A Complete Novelette of a Race for Ancient Treasure in the Deserts of the West

By

FREDERICK NIVEN

burro knows, and enough to call for water, wine, eats and the bill when I get me south some ways. There it stops."

"Then I'll read you my translation of a certain portion of a certain rare volume of old travels by one Mariano Manrique. I came upon it while pottering in the library at Madrid. This place will do fine. There is no one around here that can listen in," and he dismounted.

Pete swung from the saddle and there, in that lonely scene, Raymond produced a pocket-book and took from it several neatly folded pages. He began to read:

> Coronado met only with disappointment in his long journey to find the fabled city of Quivira. One man, Don Hernando Benevente, did not turn back with him immediately to go southward. He had no dread of the people, and having made friends among them they told him of where gold was to be found. So he went west with these red friends, and five little asses—

"Burros!" muttered Pete.

"Yes. I might as well have kept to Spanish there. Well, I'll go on:

> They came to a deep-set river and showed him, among the rocks, the small yellow stones that they prized less than turquoises. And he gathered a great store of this gold and loaded the panniers, one pannier to each side of his five little asses. All this while they were being watched by some wandering people called Querechos, who now cut off their return. They took shelter in a cave. Not all the cathedrals of Spain together could match this place for scale. At last, greatly loth, the asses having all been eaten, they stole forth from this cave on a dark night, and escaped through a deep and terrible cañon bisecting the range where were these caverns before which the Querechos lay in wait for them. The gold nuggets and dust, before leaving, they carried to a high and obscure shelf in the cave. But when Hernando joined Coronado again and told him the story, he would not send back a force to fetch the gold, saying: "What are five little golden asses?"

Raymond stopped reading.

"Well?" said Pete.

"Here's a copy of the map of Don Hernando," said Raymond, "that was reproduced in Manrique's volume."

Pete pored over it a while.

"I think he was lying," he said at last. "He was a brave man, but he was a gol-darn four-flusher nevertheless. Part of it sounds from the life and honest to God. There's the Colorado all right; and there is Virgin River; but the river that he shows on his map don't exist."

"Ah, but listen!" said Raymond. "I met a man over there who had been in many queer places, among them the Crockett Sink. And he told me that there had been a river there a couple of hundred years ago. He said you could sink there—no pun intended—and get seepage still."

Pete took off his hat.

"I beg your pardon, Don Hernando," said he.

"And what think you, Pete Scanlan? That's a fright of a bit of country in there, by all accounts. I can't go alone; I haven't the savvey. Mind you, we might find the gold was all gone. This is a record of getting on for four hundred years ago. But will you take it on?"

"You betcha! And honored, I assure you, that you should have thought of me for the job."

Pete held out his hand. And thus was the first step taken towards the search for the golden burros.

CHAPTER II

THE EAVESDROPPER

"A TOUGH burg!"

Such was Pete's summing up of the "city" of Sink, which they decided to make their jumping-off place because of the spur-line just completed thither.

They climbed to their room in its already sun-blistered hotel, noting, as they ascended, a great round fire alarm bell clamped to the wall with a switch protruding to spring it in case of need.

The desert dusk was gathering outside when they began to discuss the outfitting for their expedition to the Blue Range where lay still, presumably, the bones of the burros. Under a glaring, shadeless electric light in the room's center, they sat making out their list.

"We might as well get the stuff made ready for us to-night, if the store is open," Raymond suggested, and he stepped to the window.

He peered out; and then Pete, noticing how he shielded his eyes with a hand on each side like a horse's blinkers, stood up and switched off the glaring light to aid him in seeing the street outside.

"Yes, still open," said Raymond in the dark at the window.

But Pete, at that, had something else to consider. A moment after plunging the room into darkness he had seen a little round brilliance on the wall. He stared at it. As he stared it was eclipsed, then showed again.

"All right. Turn the light on," said Raymond, fumbling back from the window.

Pete did so and sat down. Then very quietly he spoke.

"Say," he said, "sit down here beside me and don't look as if you were listening too eager."

Raymond did as he was bid, saying nothing.

"There's a hole in the partition between our room and the next," Pete whispered. "And somebody was looking through it at us, or listening through it to us. When I switched off our light their hole did not show at once, and that wasn't just because my eye didn't catch it. There was somebody blocking it up. Then they slipped away and turned their light off. Guess they had sense to think it might show in the hole and worry us. Get that?"

"Uh-hu!" grunted Raymond, with no movement of his lips.

"If there is anything I hate it is uncertainty," said Pete. "I can't go on wondering. I got to know. Now listen: we can't watch the next room all the time to find out who's spying on us just as soon as we come here. So I'm going along to the fire-bell to bring him out. When it rings, just you get to the door here and take tally, will you—color of hair and eyes, distinguishing marks if any, as the proclamation for wanted men says."

He rose and departed. Then the fire alarm sprung. The whirring, metallic din of it filled the whole wooden box of the hotel.

Raymond went at once to the door and stood there looking out. Men with open shirts, and in their socks, went by, carrying suit-cases hastily filled with contents just grabbed up and stuffed disorderly therein, a corner of clothing sticking out, maybe, an end of necktie or suspenders, perhaps. On the stairs, at the lobby's end, the proprietor was mounting; and there was Pete.

"Say, mister," he was saying, "I was stretching up as I passed the turn there and gave her a touch. How do you shut her off? She sure goes on a hair trigger."

The proprietor had a look of annoyance on his face, but there was a response to that in a keen, piercing look from those netted grey eyes of Pete's. So he let his annoyance subside.

"All right, sir," said he. "Guess we'll call it fire drill. Anyhow, it shows the thing works, and guests don't need to worry about it. That's all right, gentlemen. It was an accident."

Pete turned, saw Fletcher in the knot of men. He also saw Fletcher's near eyelid droop in a slow wink, then noted his gaze go aslant to a man there who peered into the crowd. It was the man from the next room.

Back to their own room went Pete and Raymond and closed the door.

"A pretty mean-looking cuss, eh?" remarked Raymond.

"You bet," Pete agreed. "And now, having identified him, I'll stroll down and have a little chat with the proprietor in a friendly way about his hotel and his guests. And in particular I'll find out as much as I can about this Mr. Peeping Tom. If I'm any judge he was no casual eavesdropper. He looks to me as tough as Old Nick. I wonder what we were saying before I tumbled to that knot-hole."

"So do I," confessed Raymond. "I doubt if anyone who did not know all would get the drift. We were talking about hiring horses and buying grub, but I don't think we gave away what we are out for."

Pete moved to the door.

"Well, take care of yourself," warned Raymond.

WHILE his partner was gone he spent the time in copying, carefully, the map of Hernando Benevente's wanderings from the original copy he had already made in Madrid from the tome of Mariano. He wanted to have it memorized, and then destroyed.

One copy he made carefully with his first copy before him, then another from memory. He compared them and, satisfied that he could at any moment sit down over a piece of paper and reproduce the map in its exactitude, he burnt all. The black ash he shook into powder on a corner of the wash-stand.

"There!" thought he. "One's head is the best place to keep such things. That's that!"

Half an hour later the door opened and Pete Scanlan, entering, tossed his hat on the bed, sat down beside Raymond, and talked very quietly.

"I didn't pry at the proprietor," he said. "I went to the livery stable, and there I found an old acquaintance, if not a bosom crony. He asked me no questions on my business, but he answered me about Peeping Tom. I described that guy to him and he tells me that his name is Ed Mills, and that he is a sinner from 'way back. No visible means of support. Lives on his wits and card stunts."

He paused, nodding his head once or twice.

"They've got a little news-sheet here in this newly arisen city," he went on. "And the editor, being also reporter and printer—looking both ways—got after me. I've told him all about our trip—"

"All about our—"

"Yap. How you are interested in matches, chief share-holder in a big match-making concern. What you're here for is to go out in the Crockett Range, with me as an experienced guide, timber-cruising, looking for white pine. Oh, it will be a great thing for Sink to have a new industry! This explains us, you see. And it also will please Sink, for it would mean a match-block factory in the place. He's rushed off to his office to put it all down, and it will be in the *Sink County Crier* tomorrow afternoon. You should have heard me talk. It all came to me like turning on a tap. I got all het up about white pine and a match-block factory."

He stopped speaking to roll a cigarette.

"What's that black ash there?" he asked, nodding to the washstand.

"I thought it better to have this map in my head than on paper. We might lose it. When you were out I copied it once or twice and can do it from memory. Then I burnt 'em all."

"Good scheme!" said Pete. "I got it pretty well fixed in my head too. We know, obvious, it is the Blue Range, and the third gulch from north. We don't need a map. Good scheme!"

The livery-stable being unable to supply them with horses, they went over, in the morning, to an Indian rancheree where a wrinkled old red lady, hoeing beyond a snake fence, gave them further directions, and soon they were sitting on the bars of a very old corral beside an antique Indian whose braids, hanging on each side of his head, were white, a very aged man with still the heart to watch a deal in horses. His son, with as much of an American air to him as Amerind, brought in a *remuda*. The selection began, with many a witticism from Pete, to the chuckling joy of the old man.

They seemed by no means a bad bunch of Indians, these. The rancheree indeed had not, to Pete's senses, as tough a feeling as had the city of Sink. He handed nickels for candy to a shy papoose or two, and the old women smiled. One girl, a lissome creature with the quick movements of a deer, followed him with an adoring look in her big, black eyes.

"That gazelle is quite taken with you, Pete," murmured Raymond.

Pete looked up and saw.

"Gazelle is good," he murmured back. "She has the grace of an athlete."

Then he turned away, more keen on horses than on Indian maidens.

CHAPTER III

A HOSTAGE

THREE days later, far west on the shoulders of the Crockett Range, Raymond found himself alone in camp. It is not only the major events but the minor that may put a temporary knot in an expedition. The upset here was a very common one in a land where horse-fodder is sparse, and you just have to take a chance on the horses straying if they are to have anything to eat. They had strayed, and Pete was off in search of them.

Raymond sat by the last flicker of the breakfast fire, lost in reverie.

"Chut!" he said to himself. "They must have strayed a long way. He's been the whole forenoon."

For consolation he produced another of his remaining cigarettes of Algeria. The day grew sultry, and he sleepy. Chin on chest he dozed.

Thus it was that certain gentlemen, three all told, who had stolen a march upon him, found him. One, as you may guess, you have already seen. He had eyes shifty enough for looking through key-holes or knot-holes; but he was of the genus "coyote." There was no lone wolf about him. He required help. And, to aid him, this furtive Mr. Mills had brought Jim Laramie—though whether Laramie was his natal name or not none knew. He had been behind the bars once or twice, over conjuring tricks with branding irons. A heavy set man was he, with eyes as searching as were Mills' evasive.

The other member of this more than fishy trio had known many a nick-name in his life. One was Springheel Jack or, for a variant, Springheels. Another was Jerky, this because of his walk. It seemed as if there were springs in his heels. Something of a wrestler he was too, although a light-weight. The queer thing about him was that he had a side that could take him into the hills, and that not merely looking for trouble. He was not all for card tables. He knew the trails. He was proud, one might almost say conceited, about the way he could stalk deer, still hunt, "freeze." And it is a fact that he had been, upon the last two days and nights, snake-like, very close to the camps of Pete and Raymond, the advance scout of that tough triangle.

When, after his scouting ahead that morning he returned to his cronies to tell of the departure of Pete to find the obviously strayed horses, the trio beamed together.

"How about sneaking up to this dude from the East," suggested Springheels, "and just naturally holding him up?"

"What for?"

"To make him squeal. Or if he don't squeal, to hold him till we get his partner and make *him* squeal."

Mills' eyes went blink, blink.

"Wouldn't it be better to keep track of them till they get to this cache they're after, and then—" he nodded. It was all in his nod. It was clear that he would go to any lengths.

"Risky," said Laramie. "Folks in Sink, having the idea they are after white pine—as the paper said—will look for them coming back. If they don't return the mayor may get up a search-party. A couple of corpuses would look bad. But if we could rattle one or the other, or play the one against the other to blab just what and where this cache is, that would be safer."

Leading their horses, they crept up to Raymond's camp and when they saw him napping it was as though the devil had delivered him into their hands. This was very much a job to the heart of the agile Springheels.

"Now!" said he, taking command; and leapt.

He settled on Raymond at that leap, hands on his shoulders, and made to prod him with a knee in the wind. But Raymond, though wakened thus summarily (so that for a moment he thought that what was happening was in a dream and not in life) lurched himself sideways, doubled himself up like a knife half shut, then drew up his feet until they were under Springheels, and thrust.

He sent the little man flying. Up he rose, sprang at him and crashed him down. Then, seeing the other two, he whirled aside for his sporting rifle that lay beside his blankets.

But they jumped at him; and, as he wrestled, his head was thrust down in earth. He smelt the odor of it. He smelt the old pine needles. Someone sat on his head, as one sits on a fallen horse till the harness is taken off, he heaving as well as he could, without dislocating his neck. No good! He was trussed up! He was a prisoner. He was but a human bundle.

THEY flung him over a pack-saddle as though he were so much dunnage, and away they went up hill till they arrived at an old crumbling cabin. There Raymond was unceremoniously yanked, rather than helped, down.

"Walk!" said Springheels.

His eyes showed that he meant it.

"Which way?" asked Raymond.

"Up hill."

Up hill went Raymond Fletcher, battered, thinking hard, and glum. Above a broad slide of rubble, with bushes taking hold upon it as if in an attempt to cover it up, was a prospect tunnel.

"Straight ahead into the mine," ordered Springheels.

"What's the idea?" asked Raymond.

"Just that you are held as hostage till your partner sees fit to tell us where your cache is."

"Cache?" echoed Raymond.

"That's the word. For we happen to know that you are no more after white pine than my Aunt Maria."

"I don't know the lady," said Raymond.

He walked into the tunnel. Mills switched on an electric flashlight when they came beyond the thin last radiance on the balks that sustained the roof.

"I guess in here will do," said he. "You'll be out of the draught."

He stepped aside into a branch working, the beginning of a stope.

"We'll leave you some grub and some water," he went on, "and you'll stay here. Now don't you try to get out. One of us will be at the tunnel's end, and if you come out—" he made a dab in air with a finger, "your name is Dennis."

"Rather foolish plan that, isn't it?" asked Raymond.

"Why?"

"I might be the goose with the golden eggs. It might be I who knew where this cache is that you've got it into your head we're after."

Mills laughed, a raucous, cackling laugh.

"We know different," said he. "You both know. Your partner will blab so as to get you free, otherwise when he returns to town again he'll be held pending inquiries as to where you are anyhow. Two men don't go out in the hills in these days and one return alone without questions being asked."

"I'm glad you have such a good opinion of the times you live in," said Raymond. "And I might just point out to you that kidnapping, or holding for ransom, is a bit risky in these days. Even in Mexico—where they are still backward enough to go in for such things—it is apt to raise hell."

"Oh, that's up to us. We're taking chances. When we get through with you, you can go and look for your white pine—that is if your partner comes across. If he does not, here you stop!"

Raymond smiled faintly. He saw the other side, as they knew he would. He guessed that they were not frank in their account of their plans. They hoped that he, before long, would of himself have an announcement to make them, offer to barter his knowledge for his freedom.

But for the moment they left him. Mills felt him over before going, lest he had an automatic in a pocket. At the same time he removed the ropes from his hands.

Raymond sat down with his back against a timber to think. He was in that niche just where the last spray of light from without showed on one of the supports of the tunnel.

"A pretty kettle of fish!" he remarked to himself. "What's to prevent them holding up Pete somewhere, and keeping him too? They can tell him that when I blab he will get free. Then they can wait to see which of us first gets weary and offers to tell."

Peering into the tunnel he knew there was a sentry. He could tell that by puffs of tobacco smoke wafting in a little wind past the entry. He went back into his niche and sat down. And then there came again the glow of the flashlight. Two men were before him, the heavy Laramie and the little one who made Raymond think of a dancing master.

"Well," said Laramie, pleasantly, "how are you making out?"

"All right."

"We've brought you some food and water as we promised. And how about agreeing to lead us to that cache? We've got your partner now. He came back with the strayed horses, and we got him. And we'll keep him till you talk. We've got him trussed up safe and sound."

"Have you? Pretty slick work, eh? Well, I can't think who is going to tell you where the cache is—if there is a cache."

"You are. We're not going as easy with your partner as we are with you. He ain't going to get a drop to drink or a bite to eat till you lead us to it. Now get that fixed in your bean."

"A very serious charge you've got coming to you," said Raymond. "You're torturing him."

"No, we ain't."

"To keep a man without water and food is torture," replied Raymond.

"It will be you that keeps him without water and food. It's up to you to torture him or not."

"I think you men must have come out of hell," said Raymond, as one talking a thought aloud.

"Never mind where we come from. What are you going to do about it?"

"This!" shouted Raymond.

He leapt forward and smashed a fist first in the face of the heavier man so that he went down like a felled ox, and then he whirled on the light-weight. But Springheels was a very eel. Better had Raymond taken him first, for he ducked and, ducking, grabbed up a loose rock in his hand, flicked the flashlight out a second so that they were in the dark, then on again and dealt Raymond a blow behind the ear.

A hundred stars danced before Fletcher's eyes. Then there was a darkness out of which he came to the sound of a low moan. It was his own voice. He was still in the tunnel, but he was now manacled about the ankles. His hands were free, and he felt down to discover what held him.

Iron. Iron links. He groped in his pockets for a match, lit it and looked. They were rusty chains that had probably been used for some work in the mine, but they were assuredly strong. He considered that he must have been unconscious some time from that blow, to have fallen into this plight without the faintest knowledge. There was an iron ring round one ankle and from it a length of chain stretched both ways. He moved out one way to find what the chain, at that side, was affixed to and, doing so, drew the other length taut. He stretched in the opposite direction and could not find where that end was fastened, only drew taut the end he had slackened in the earlier movement.

CHAPTER IV

FRANCESCA

PETE decided there was no sense in being angry at the horses. They had to eat. Philosophically, though bored, he accepted the situation. But when, returning to camp, he found no fire smoke, no meal awaiting him, and no Raymond, he was utterly nonplussed.

Surveying the camp, wondering what had happened, he could not fail to see signs of a scrimmage. The old question of whether cougars do or do not attack men was again in his mind. But here were no cougar pads. There had been men here and, by the signs, an unholy fracas. He looked up from the disordered earth, his hand dropping to his hip near to the consoling butt of his Colt. A twig snapped. His fingers curved to grab the gun, and then—

"What the hell," he began, staring.

There was an Indian girl, leading a pinto horse, advancing through the scrub.

"It's me," she said, no more grammatical in that phrase than most whites.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Pete. "Where did you spring from? I know your face. Why yes, I saw you at the rancheree back there near Sink."

"I'm Francesca Xavier," she told him, gravely.

"What are you doing here?" he asked. Her eyelids drooped.

"Three men," she said, "came to buy horses after you. I heard them talking. They did not trouble about me, took me for a blanket Indian that didn't know English. I speak English, but I have gone back to the blankets because I like them, and I like moccasins better than shoes."

"You're a good judge," said Pete. "They sure fit easy and don't cramp the toes."

"I came after you to tell you," she said, and met his gaze. Again her eyelids drooped.

Not the first Indian flapper she, by a long way, since Pocahontas, to be smitten to the heart by the look in the eyes of one of the invading race. Not the first Indian maiden she to risk much for one sign of gratefulness from the object of her adoration.

"Gee, stuck on me!" thought Pete. "Well, what do you know?" But he did not say that aloud. To the girl he said: "Do you know anything about where my partner is, seeing that you've been after us so close?"

"I saw it all," she replied, "or the end of it, anyhow. They didn't see me. These three men have your partner tied up. I tracked them and came on them when they were dismounting at an old prospect in the draws up there."

"What are they like, these three?"

She described them, with a gift as of a caricaturist as much as of a portrait painter. It occurred to him that she could make the squaws laugh in the rancheree or in camp with mimicry of the white folks.

"I think I've seen one of them in Sink," he said. "And what should I do first?" he asked with that air of badinage that clung to him even in troubled moments.

"You'd better not stay here to think that out," advised Francesca, staring at him, puzzled, not exactly understanding his manner. "They might come back to see if you'd returned."

"Is it far in to this shack?" asked Pete.

"Not by an air-line, but a thousand feet of a climb up, I guess," Francesca told him.

"Well, I'd better tether the pack-horses this time, and my partner's horse. I might want them in a hurry coming down."

"Sure. And I think we'd better tether your saddle horse too, and us go on foot ourselves."

"What? We? You coming along to show me, instead of just telling me?"

"Sure," she said, in a husky voice.

"Oh, Francesca! But a thousand feet up—that is an awful way to go on foot," said Pete the horseman.

"It's a narrow trail, and if any of them are coming down we couldn't get the horses out of sight," said Francesca.

"That's right too. Well, on foot it is, then."

They tethered all the horses away from the camp in a draw with a chaparral and jungly bottom, to which Francesca led the way, and then set off up the slopes. The old trail to the prospect had not gone up that side. The prospector who found the lead had doubtless followed up a creek from the other, and so it was not until they were high up among the hog-backs that they had much of a trail beyond that made by their kidnapping enemies.

"WE'RE just coming to a good trail," said Francesca, "at the top of this rise."

"Not before time," replied Pete. "If I was to meet right now the man who made walking fashionable, him and me would have some interchange of repartee."

Francesca understood all that but she did not smile. She looked idolizingly at the big man who had taken her so much for granted. There was the trail winding up the creek bank.

"The shack is just above," said Francesca.

"Now look here," said Pete, "there is liable to be trouble. I don't want you to get tangled in our gun-play, if it comes to that. A lady should keep back out of range of gun-play."

First sign, that, of thought of her. She took it with a pathetic solemnity. Suddenly there came to their ears, through the hushed mosaic of sun and leaf shadows, the sound of a voice.

"This is where you beat it," said Pete.

"They're coming this way," she answered. "We must hunt cover. Come along, I'll show you."

Hunt, and find it, they did, in short

notice, in the heart of a mock orange bush that was all a mass of suckers round its main stem. With the voices there came the occasional thud of a hoof on a hollow part of the trail where some big stone had rolled away. Then a horse jogged past, and another. Then there was a space, and one more—the last rider.

"That should be easy enough," they heard one of them say. "All we got to do is to wait for him coming back with the horses. And he's not going to draw a bead on three men if they don't act hostile, even if we don't ketch him asleep."

"That's right," said another voice. "It's a cinch he won't open hostilities and try to work a stand-off. We just naturally ride into his camp—"

"And arrest him!" came a third voice that ended in a crackling laugh.

Not till long after the voices had faded down hill did Francesca or Pete move.

"Well," said the Indian girl, "they had not your friend along with them."

"So now we go up and see—" began Pete.

"If they've—" interrupted Francesca, and stopped.

"What?"

"We'll see what we'll see."

With a more gripping anxiety now Pete led on, desperately urgent. He wondered if they had scared Raymond into divulging his quest, and giving the location of their journey's end. If they had, then might not these crooks have just finished him off?

They saw the darkened logs of the old shack ahead under the trees, a pattern of cedar branches stencilled on it.

"They had somebody else up here, think you?" suggested Pete.

"No. Nobody," she assured him.

Stillness. Profound stillness. If Raymond were here, then surely he was a dead man! He wondered what revelation awaited them, a prey to suspense and foreboding. They went furtively. They opened the door, letting it fall aside on its one remaining hinge. They stepped in, Pete with a hand on his gun despite that almost certainty that there was nobody guarding the place.

No, no one. Only a lath of afternoon sunlight atilt from the small window space, spreading at its base into a parallelogram of gold on the earthen floor.

"He's not here," said Pete.

"Not here," [illegible] Francesca.

They turned [illegible] into the open. As they did so [illegible] as of tissue paper blown across [illegible] moved along above them, the sound of a thin wind passing in the woods. It came into the tops of a pine that stood at the door. It sighed in its topmost needles and left a hush more profound, it seemed, when it was gone.

"Can you do any tracking?" asked Pete.

"I'm looking," replied the girl, bending before the door.

She wandered away, made circles round the shack, widening circles, and then returned.

"We go up hill here," said she, and led off. She had found a little trail.

"Oh," said Pete, "it's the tunnel," for the black front of its deep shadow, to one side, caught his eyes.

There at the tunnel they halted and looked one to the other. A cat-bird mewed to them from below, so that for a moment one might have thought the old shack was still a home for somebody who owned a cat, and that it cried for his return.

"If they've done anything to him—" began Pete.

And then they both tilted their heads and sniffed. There was an odor in the air. It was new to the Indian girl, but it was a familiar one by now to Pete—the smell of an Algerian cigarette. He plunged into the tunnel.

"Hullo, Raymond Fletcher!" he called. "You there?"

"Hullo! Hullo, Pete!"

There was a dull bump, followed by a dull expletive. Raymond, rising abruptly, had hit his head on a low beam.

"My darn head is all bumps as big as ostrich eggs," they heard.

"Where are you?"

"Right here. Here, light a match and see where the ends of these chains are fixed, and get 'em loose. Oh, hullo! Who's your lady friend?"

"This is Francesca Xavier. Meet Raymond Fletcher, Francesca."

"How do you do?" said Raymond, and inclined his head.

"How do you do?" replied Francesca into the darkness where the red end of a cigarette of Algiers glowed.

They struck matches. They found one chain's end affixed by a horse-shoe staple to one balk. The other was similarly fastened, the chains first twisted round the balks to make a direct haul useless toward dragging the staples out.

"Let's see how it is fixed to you. It might be easier to get you loose there," said Pete.

CHAPTER V

A THREESOME

IN THE end, by aid of an old file which Francesca found, they got Raymond free of his shackles. He was out in the open air with them again, blinking at the light, his largest spare handkerchief, soaked in water from the creek that drained the lower tunnel, bound round his head.

"What with clouts by intent, and clouts I've had by moving around to the limit of my tether in there, bumping on balks I could not see, I feel in need of a wet turban," said Raymond. "Gosh, Pete Scanlan, my friend, I've led you into some pickle of a job. I wish for your sake I had never found the *Lives and Days of the Conquistadors* by Mariano Manrique, in the library of Madrid."

"Pickle nothing!" Pete drawled. "This little *pasear* of ours is sure a relief from what they call the *Te Deum Vitæ*. And this is sprightly travel you're having now, travel with some kick to it."

Raymond smiled at his partner. The Indian girl, without a word, rose and unwound the dried kerchief from Fletcher's head and went off to soak it again. The two looked after her.

"Say, what about her?" said Raymond.

So Pete told of her coming after them in an attempt to let them know of the pursuing party of crooks.

"I don't know what she figures on doing now," said he.

Back came Francesca and tied the kerchief over Raymond's head in which the pulses throbbed like a hundred riveters in a ship-yard.

"When you feel fit we ought to be hitting the grit down that hill," said Pete. "These three bold bandits have gone to look for me. They may find the horses, and so know I was back. They are coming back anyhow, with me or without. The fact that they left you a dish of grub and a pannikin of water shows that they didn't aim to starve you outright."

Raymond rose and then puckered both of his eyes and grimaced, lifting his hands to his temples, for in the action of rising suddenly the blood hammered and stabbed in his head again. His wrist-watch had been smashed in his rough-and-tumbles of the day. Pete's watch, to quote his own words, had at last gone on the blink, after having been failing so badly for some time, with sand into its insides, that you'd ha' needed a pencil and paper to figure out the correct time from it. But they had the sun-dials of the hog-backs and trees to tell them the afternoon was far advanced.

Some way down Francesca led them off at a tangent, into the draw where the horses were tethered.

"So here we are again," said Raymond, walking up to his horse and running a hand down its nose.

The horse lowered its head and shoved the broad, white-splashed forehead against the man's chest. Pete held out a sack of tobacco, the papers thrust in it.

"No use," said Raymond. "Off it, for the time being. Not Virginian, nor Turkish, nor Algerian could tempt me," and he closed his eyes again in a tight puckering as the blood surged in his temples.

"Well, we'll camp right down and have coffee," said Pete, "if we can find water. And if our three bandits smell the smoke, and try to sneak up on us, we'll blow them to purgatory. That's all there's to it."

They found water, or the Indian girl did, and they ate and drank, and when they talked, talked quietly, alert the while for any sound in the forest.

"What will you do now, Francesca?" asked Raymond.

She looked from one to the other and had no reply.

"Will you go back home alone?" said Pete.

She had no response to that.

"Dang it," he went on, "we can't let her go alone. If they can read the trail they'll see her moccasin marks, and if they met up with her there might be trouble."

Still Francesca said nothing, but they could see the dread in her eyes.

"We've got to thank you for coming

after us," said Pete after a pause. "I never asked if you happened to hear them say just why they wanted to follow us."

"I didn't," replied Francesca. "I only gathered you were after something they also wanted."

Raymond and Pete exchanged glances, and then they told her the whole truth of their expedition—about the fat volume in the library at Madrid, and the account of Don Hernando Benevente who went west for gold. They told her all they knew about the treasure of "the five little golden asses," as Coronado called it. Francesca sat listening.

"I know the place," she said when, without a solitary interruption or any facial change, she had heard the whole matter.

"You know the caves!" exclaimed Pete.

"Yes, but I have never gone into them."

"Why not?" he asked, scenting fresh mystery.

"It may be because of inherited memories," she said, out of her schooling knowledge. "It may be because of our old legends. It may be merely a feeling natural to anyone, Indian or white in such places. They are—well, they are so queer. You'll see, if you get there."

Her serious tone hushed the two white listeners. Though she had paused they did not speak. They waited for more.

"I could take you there," said she, earnestly.

"She could take us there," said Pete.

"I have crossed the sands often," she went on, in an eager voice, "with my people. We visit the Navajos and the Hopis that way sometimes. Where you plan to cross, at the far end of Crockett Range, is as good as any for distance. You get water before leaving, and on arrival—a small spring. But you can head right out here too; and there is water at a place called Pile of Rocks. Maybe that spring was even once part of your river, for my people have a legend that there was a river where your Don Hernando says, across what we now call the Crockett Sink."

"If Indian legend says so—" said Raymond.

"It goes," finished Pete.

Though Pete was the one to whom she had lost her heart, Raymond was the one who was more interested in her. She was a new type to him, the mission Indian girl gone back to moccasins in place of high-heeled shoes, a sort of survival of the Neolithic Age with an amalgam of the Steel Age.

"If she came with us, and we made good, we would give her a share in return for acting as guide, and also for coming to warn us. Eh, Pete?"

"Sure! Suits me."

Francesca heaved a big sigh.

"I don't want to come for that," said she.

Raymond felt suddenly a tremendous pity for her. She seemed unaware of him at that moment, her eyes on Pete. There was something pathetic in the way she wore her heart so obviously on her sleeve.

Pete thrust his cigarette into the earth, extinguishing it. The gesture struck both his partners as having an air of finality. It was not just putting out a cigarette. It was finishing a discussion.

CHAPTER VI

INTO THE DESERT

LONG before dawn Francesca led the party from the Crockett Range. And when the primrose shafts shot up out of the east, they turned into a long crease where they would not be revealed on the skyline.

They glanced back at the Crockett Range and there it stretched with an effect as if coming bodily on, all its length, after them. The smell of the sage filled their nostrils instead of that of scorched pines and firs. By afternoon they found that they had passed into a trail that was hardly more than a few inches wide. Others showed. They were all converging on some given point. Strayed cattle knew them, deer knew them, these had made them. For the place Francesca led to was a small water-hole under a weird tumbled cone of rocks, a water-hole on the face of which there were constant tiny pulsings and tremblings, as of the first beginnings of the boiling of a pot. But it was no hot spring; it tasted cold after their ride.

While the men sat smoking after a meal the Indian girl climbed to the summit of that strange rock pile. Suddenly they heard an exclamation from her. It was in her own tongue, not in theirs. And all

Indian she seemed as they looked up at her.

"What is it?"

"They have field-glasses," said she.

"They have field-glasses!"

"Yes. I saw the light twinkle in them just now." She snapped her fingers. "Just as if someone lit a match—like that! It picked them out for me."

She came down from the pyramid of rocks.

"It might not be them," said Pete. "It might be punchers out looking for strayed stock, or for outlaw horses."

"Well, you've got to find that out," said she. "Farther on there is no place for you to hold them off, if necessary, like this."

"Well, what about it?" asked Raymond, turning to Pete.

"We'll wait and see," Pete counselled.

They waited, filling their canteens, and leading the horses to the water again to suggest to them that another drink might be as well. The spring was some way off from the actual pile of rocks itself, and, in the event of their enemies coming close, they'd want a place among these rocks from which to stand them off.

As they watched, little pennants of dust rose as if a wind had flicked up a localized storm, infinitesimal small columns of dust. These drew nearer. They were heading straight for the rocks, whoever they were, the riders in that sift of dust. Half an hour later—

"It's them!" said Francesca and Pete in unison.

Pete, rising atop of a bowlder, hailed them immediately.

"Stop right there where you are!" he shouted.

By the sudden start of the three riders on hearing his voice, the inference was that they were under the impression that they had been merely following trail some distance behind their prey. They evidently thought that the party they pursued had gone on ahead, beyond Pile of Rocks. They clustered out at a hundred yards and conferred together. Then—

"Come down here. We want to speak to you," Laramie called.

"Sorry we can't have the pleasure at the moment," Pete called back. "We'll give you an appointment for a month from to-day."

"It's all right," shouted Laramie. "We got a proposition to put up to you."

"I can't wait. I'll tell my secretary (when I decide whether to have the blonde or the brunette) to take a note of it on the engagement pad. Make it a month from to-day, any hotel you like in any city from Salt Lake to Tucson."

The tone was of persiflage, but there was rage on his face.

Again there was consultation below. And after it the man they called Springheels jigged a litle way forward, having dismounted.

"Say," he chirped, "the sheriff at Sink is onto it that you are out to find a cache. He'll be after you. It's illegal to appropriate. You might as well let us in on it."

Pete tossed his head and laughed. Springheels drew closer. The other two, still in their saddles, joggled up behind him. Then suddenly the led horses broke away and headed for the spring, shoving one against the other. The wall of rocks surrounding the water rattled under their hoofs.

"Come back, you there!" shouted Mills. He rode after them.

Pete emitted a hissing sound between his teeth.

"We didn't expect that," he muttered, "for the led horses to work it for them. I was going to order them off from the water under penalties from my six-gun, and now the Peeping Tom guy is there with the horses."

"You can think over our proposition," called Laramie. "It is either us in for shares, or else we blab and you got to hand over to the government whatever it is you're on to. It ain't yours."

"That's all right. Don't you worry," advised Pete. "You don't look good to me. Your dancing partner told us the sheriff at Sink knows already. Anyhow, the original owner is dead a long while. It would sure come back to us in the absence of heirs. So you can go to hell. That's my advice to you!"

Then he looked down aslant at Francesca who crouched hidden among the bowlders.

"Sorry to use such language before a lady," he said, quietly.

Springheels gathered the lines of his horse and led it away towards the water-hole. As he did so he looked round with such a leer that rage swam in Pete's whole frame. His fingers quivered with the impulse to grab his gun and shoot. It was a pose and motion that did not fail to be seen. Laramie slipped the reins from his right to his left hand, to have that right ready for action. Then, gazing up at Pete, he rode slowly and carefully aslant after his fellows.

They were all keyed up, ready for trouble at a drop of a handkerchief. It was a moment ripe for a word and a blow. A rash movement would have precipitated it, and the barking guns would have thudded echoes from Pile of Rocks.

"Well, they've got the water!" said Pete, with disgust.

"And we've got the grit," replied Raymond. He smiled wryly on the bad play upon words, for they had grit in two ways—grit and rocks around them, and grit—in the other sense—in them.

But thirst as an ally of the enemy is a great ally. Still, their canteens were full. They could start out if they cared to. That was the thought taking birth in Francesca's mind.

"We can go on," she pointed out. "They can have the water. You've got all you can carry. We can get the horses down on the other side of Pile of Rocks and beat it."

She rose and stepped up and away over the rocks. Lines in hand, half-turned to show that pony of hers the way, she bent low to hide her own body from the watchers. A hail came to them suddenly from below.

"If you don't stop to talk it over for shares you can't go on. You go out from them rocks and we shoot."

Pete rose. He leapt goat-like from one rock to another to get in full view of the speaker, who had evidently seen the girl's horse humping on the ridge. He shook his fist down at them. It was Mills who had spoken, his Peeping Tom of the knot-hole in the Sink hotel.

"And if you shoot, who would there be to put you wise?" he yelled.

"Oh, the one that remained would do it—or follow the other West."

Pete Scanlan's hand swung down to his Colt and it was out, and the thud of the report sounded. But whether the bullet found its mark or not he did not know. He only knew that Mills had gone summarily, popped down from view among the harsh, bare rocks.

CHAPTER VII

MIRAGE OR TRUTH

HEADS together, listening for a moment among the rocks below, they crouched there scheming out a plan. And even as they were thus employed they were aware of a stir in the air. There came a gentle peppering round them, and they saw that a multitude of crane-flies were being wafted into the rock crevices. A steady, thin wind had sprung up, blowing off the desert.

Soon came sand, spat-spattering—tiny particles of it, and the sky overhead was of a lugubrious hue. No, it was not sky; it was thin sand, a very wraith of a sand-cloud sifting over. And on the wind came the crane-flies in hundreds, lodging in crannies of the rock pile and staggering about.

Then, as a result of that conference, Raymond rose. He climbed slowly to the highest rock, deliberately, unarmed, canting his head as he did so; for up there he got the full impact of the blown sand, the fine stinging particles. By a mocking bow he made, his two companions knew that the enemy had seen him.

"Well, have you any proposition to make?" he asked.

"Just the same as before," came the answer. "Let you both come down—unarmed. Then you can lead off to this cache you're after, and we'll share it."

"'You both'," quoted Pete quietly to Francesca. "So they don't know you're with us."

Francesca nodded slowly, listening.

"I don't quite see the fairness of that," replied Raymond. "It's a one-sided contract. What assurance do we get that when you see what you want, if we're unarmed, you don't just take a chance and—well, where do we come in? What do you think?"

Pete's face puckered in a grin of appreciation over his partner's manner.

"Guess you got to take a chance at that. We'd give you our word," came the voice of Mills. So the shot had missed.

"Oh, you would!" exclaimed Raymond, delighted. "That would be quite satisfactory. I must ask my partner what he thinks of that."

He turned, glanced down at Pete, and winked. Then he looked out to east.

"What the—" he began, but said no more. He swung round quickly towards the men at the well.

"Say," one of them shouted; it was Laramie. "If your partner is coming up to talk along with you, tell him not to bring any swift gun-play with him. Tell him to come up with his hands in front of him, and empty."

"For you to cover us, and then take us both prisoners? Nothing doing!" said Raymond. "I'll see you later."

He popped down beside Pete and Francesca, sudden as a jack-in-the-box.

"Say," said he, "what does a mirage look like? Can you see whole strings of burros, and men in topis and men in Stetsons?"

"What is it?" asked Pete, gazing at him curiously, and frowning.

"Out there in that haze—burros and burros and burros, a string of them coming this way, and riders in pith helmets and Stetsons."

"The Stetsons make sure they ain't ghosts of the Conquistadors," said Pete. "I got to get up and look at this mirage. There ain't only five burros, is there?"

"No, no."

"Just wait while I pop up and see if I can see what you can see," said Pete.

CHAPTER VIII

EUCHRED!

"WELL, here we are again," said Pete. "Want to see me? This is the other member of the firm."

He turned his head and, prepared for what he saw, showed no sign of astonishment.

"We've told you," said Mills. "Think it out. Maybe after you get real dry you'll take the chance."

Pete raised his hat high in air and made salutations as of mocking bows. Then he glanced over his shoulder again. Next moment he slipped down beside Francesca, Raymond, and the demure looking horses.

"Five more minutes will do it," he said, "and they will be here. They saw me wave; one or two waved back. Our friends the enemies can't see them yet. The Lord knows who or what they are, but they are no mirage."

Then, four minutes gone, they all three rose. Pete jumped to the rock atop.

"All right," said he.

Up came Raymond behind him. They looked down. There, stringing round the shoulder of the pile, out of the desert, came a queue of laden burros and men on horseback. The three at the spring were also staring at them, as though they thought them unreal.

"Come on," said Pete, "here's where we lead our horses down. There's going to be no gun-play with all this crowd of witnesses."

They took up the lines of their horses, these glad to move, and down they went the way they had mounted. The party that had arrived was clustering round the spring. They were educing pails from packs. Into the midst of this came our trio.

"Here, you talk, Ray. You got a winning way with you," said Pete.

Raymond stepped up to a tall, elderly man who was standing looking on, giving an order now and then with something of the air of a general.

"Quite a regiment you have, sir," said he. "One does not often see such a party in these places. My name is Fletcher, Raymond Fletcher."

The tall man held out his hand.

"I'm happy to meet you," he said. "My name is James—Hesketh James. This is the Hesketh James Scientific Research Expedition. We have just got this far, as you see, across the apalling Sink of Crockett. Our last work was a complete exploration of some interesting caves in the Blue Range."

"The hell it was!" Pete muttered to himself.

The three crooks were staring in utter bewilderment first at the Hesketh James Expedition, and then at Francesca. Noting their astonishment, Pete found occasion to scratch an eyebrow with a finger, and then his nose with a furtive thumb. It was a private gesture for them. Then, while the leader of the expedition moved away to superintend some unpacking, Raymond drank long and eagerly from his canteen. And beside him Pete and Francesca, heads back, gurgled gratefully at theirs. Thus refreshed, Pete led off to the spring and stood back until the pails were filled. He then replenished all the canteens, and passed them up to Francesca, who was er to help. Later he brought their horses down to drink again.

Meanwhile Raymond leisurely drew forth his cigarette case. He had not cared to smoke up there among the heated rocks, but now that he had satisfied his thirst he did so. He took out a cigarette, tapped it on the case, lit up, blew a long feather of smoke. Then he stepped over to where the three late besiegers sat.

"Nice rifle, this," he remarked, bending over Laramie.

Laramie's eyes met his, held his, then fluttered down. For Pete stood in the background, hand on hip close to his protruding Colt. With a twisted smile Laramie resigned the weapon which had been his since they surprised Raymond in camp.

"There was only two shells in her anyhow, and I used them," he said.

"Quite so," replied Raymond. "I'm glad you had an opportunity to see how nifty she is. But it is not much use having a rifle without the shells."

Thus commenting he slipped a clip of cartridges into the magazine, slung the rifle on his shoulder, and puffed on his cigarette as he turned from them.

"And now may the Lord help you three stiffs if you don't call off after this!" muttered Pete as he too moved away.

CHAPTER IX

SAND

"WHAT do you say, Francesca?" asked Pete. "Can we go on now, out into the heart of the Sink, in this steady sift of sand?"

A light gleamed in her eyes. She was being of service again. She was being consulted.

"It may be tough," she answered, "but if you want to go, I'll lead on. I can keep the direction. It often falls dead still after sun-down, anyway."

They turned to the horses and drew the lines over their necks. Then, with a parting salutation to the leader of the expedition—who responded with a friendly wave of his hand—they mounted and rode off.

"It's going to be hell out here," said Pete, as they rode, "but needs must when the devil drives. And we were sure between the devil, so to speak, and the deep desert." He drew his scarf, bib-like, up over his mouth and nostrils. "And there's the desert getting up more still to meet us. Here's sure a rise in real estate."

"I don't believe those men back there will ever come out in this," remarked Francesca, "but if they do there won't be any trail for them to follow. The sand is covering it up."

"That's why you were so willing to face it," said Raymond.

"Sure," she agreed, and then added: "partly." She had wanted to get away from the curious looks cast at her by the men of the expedition.

"It sometimes stops quite suddenly at sun-up," she said, a few minutes later.

"Back there you said it sometimes stopped quite suddenly at sun-down," said Pete.

"This one is not going to stop at sun-down," she answered. "It is near that now."

"Is there no other place, no other pile of rocks, to shelter us for to-night?" asked Pete.

"No."

They took that in silence.

"What do you propose we should do?" Raymond wanted to know.

"Just keep them walking slowly, facing it, till it is dark," Francesca told him. And then the sophisticate spoke: "It is an arithmetical problem in horse-flesh, man-power, and water."

When night fell it looked as though the answer to the problem might end with a minus. The stars were blotted out and they had to stop. At once the horses wheeled, haunches to the direction whence the wind came. Ever and again they tried to turn back, shoving, irritable. When they could no longer be held, they were led round in a circle and so back, the impatience thus temporarily dissipated. Then a sorrel mare tried to lie down.

"Well, we'll take the pack off," said Pete.

He worked away in the dark while Raymond held the lines of his horse. The sand sifted against them, so that each felt from time to time that he was like a statue on a pedestal. It all began to have the quality of nightmare. But the nightmare had its end.

"What's that?" asked Raymond, at length, after ages it seemed.

It was the dawn. It came illumining the ribbons of sand, and suddenly as it came the peppering decreased, dwindled. There was a lull at last. There was more than a lull. The wind died, and there was Francesca's horse lying down like some trained cavalry steed, she reclining against it, drifts of sand over her leggings and in her lap. The desert suddenly blazed a reflection to the sky. Anyway to north-west was what looked like a yellow cloud, the last of the sand blowing beyond them. Ahead was just that glare under the blue, the glittering blue of the sky. Francesca pointed to the rim of it all. A darker blue was there, low, irregular, slashed with purple.

"What is it?" they asked.

"The Blue Range," said she.

The close-up of that range was the most impressive spectacle that even Raymond, the traveler, had ever seen. And, even exhausted as they all were, its lonely grandeur impressed them. Before dusk Francesca led them up under black and minatory bastions, athwart a great swerve of rock. Its humped contours were exquisitely polished through eons by the sifting of sand. In places it glittered, with a sheen as of oxidized silver.

They rode close under a high column, maybe five hundred feet high, separated from the main ridge at the top. Then they heard a trickle of water. Francesca dismounted. Stooping, she washed the grit off her hands and then drank from a cupped palm. Beyond her, lower down, they saw her horse, after a clattering in loose rocks, bend its head, and there followed that sound as of suction that a horse makes when drinking from a shallow pool. Raymond and Pete drank, as did their ponies; and then they unsaddled right where they were, on the rock ledges.

"It's all right," Francesca assured them. "Let them go. My horse will show them the way."

It was even so. All the horses were stringing away, dropping down, ghostly, from sight, with an occasional brief rattle of disturbed pebbles.

"Forty winks," said Raymond.

"Forty?" repeated Pete. "I could do with forty thousand." His voice sounded thick. "Have you still got that map fixed good and accurate in your mind?" he asked.

"I have," said Raymond. "I could make a drawing of it."

"Me too. It's in the third gulch from the north end that Don Hernando Benevente cached the stuff. We shall have some hunt along this range. We'll need the horses when they're rested. I guess our work has just begun."

"There are no caves in the other gulches. There are only some holes in limestone. This is the third gulch from the north," said Francesca, quietly.

"This is!" exclaimed Pete.

Francesca nodded.

"Then we hold right along here," said Raymond, and felt a quickened heart-beat.

"Yes," said Francesca, "or at least up above. The caves are up there. I'll take you to them."

She was markedly subdued, spoke in a low voice, seemed over-awed. There was something even in her back, as she led the way beyond that long, smooth swerve of rock and on past the high column, which told how she felt.

"Why, you little woman, you! You're scared!" said Pete.

She turned and looked him straight in the eyes.

"I am scared," she admitted. "I always feel there is something lurking in these caves, something waiting. I once went into one, but I did not go far."

Her acknowledgement was so frank that Pete had a moment's regret that he had made the remark.

"What was it like?" he asked.

"It was all bats—and that feeling," she replied. "But I'll show you."

AFTER all, the caves were not difficult of access to one who knew the way. That long undulation of the slope, not of rubble but of solid rock, now a few feet wide, now fifty, continued on between the green valley and the barren cliffs. On it they walked smartly, Raymond with his heavy sporting rifle in its sling on his shoulder, Pete with his business-like Colt, though by the inference of the great reining hush a rattlesnake might, there, be their worst foe. Their dunnage, before starting, they had cached from sight well along in the unexpected tree-filled bottoms.

Away below, in that cool glade, they could glimpse the horses grazing. As they went they opened up new views of lonely scars opposite, tall pinnacles that seemed to all of them "spooky", though none said so. They seemed to have entity, these lone hoodoos of rock, these castles with gashes in them like peep-holes, sky-scrapers of nature on the edge of the world. Then—

"Gosh!" said Pete.

Round a curve, were the caves. There they were, great gaping mouths, lit on one side a little way in, and on the other deeply shadowed. They were truly awesome. Still they held on; and soon their voices echoed back weirdly from the over hanging arch of the first.

"And now I take it back, Miss Francesca Xavier! Honest to goodness, I don't wan't to go in!" said Pete. "That's straight goods and no josh!"

"What's this?" asked Raymond, and walked up to the rock wall, under the arch of the greatest opening.

Written there, neatly, with new paint was: *Hesketh James Research Expedition. June, 1925.*

"Well," said Pete, "that's pleasant to read. That sounds sociable. It kind of helps a person to feel less lonesome and as if he was in the first stages of D. T.'s. Not that I've ever been much of a martyr to D. T.'s, but I guess this is the sort of place a fellow goes to when he's got them."

Out of the inner dark a huge bat flew and swerved, mounted in quiet gyrations, and then disappeared back into stygian blackness again.

CHAPTER X

BATS' WINGS

BOLDLY enough, to all seeming, they passed under the vaulted roof. At once they were in a cavern, all darkness in its height, with here and there the end of some stalactite just flickering to their upraised torches.

Truly not all the cathedrals of Spain put together (a phrase from the long-gone Hernando's description that came to their minds) could match this place for scale. The silence was immediately oppressive, almost palpable. It settled upon them, enfolded them. With lights held forward, they advanced, Francesca to rear.

"The chronicle said on a shelf," said Raymond.

And then: " . . . on a shelf," spoke some hollow of the roof above.

"We should keep to the sides and work round," said Pete. "I guess these research folks had gasoline lamps. These little flashlights of ours don't seem to brighten things up more than a match in here."

They were worse than that. They illumined only portions of the queer shapes round them, so that single projections of rock stood out, weirdly individual, backed by solid wedges of utter darkness.

"Beat it, will you!" exclaimed Pete, suddenly. This was to a great bat that had swooped to the spread disc of light from his flash.

They decided to try to circle the cave, working to the left, and so round; but soon they found that it would be difficult to do that, for the place was not just a single great cavern. It was many caverns in one. They peered round. They were, indeed, passing into a second cave.

"What's this?" exclaimed Francesca, who had stepped level with them.

"What's what?" said Raymond and Pete together.

Francesca was on her knees between them at the base of something that looked like a tall column. The light from the torches had illumined for her a thin, silver streak.

"It's thread," said she.

"Thread!" they echoed.

"I know," said Pete. "Those research fellows tied thread in the place so's to get in and out if anything happened to their lights. It's a world to itself in here."

And so it was. They followed the thread then, instead of continuing to explore to left along the edges. It led on into chamber after chamber, tied every here and there to projections of the floor. In some places other threads were also tied, leading into side caverns.

"We'd better follow each of them," suggested Raymond, "and keep looking up on the walls for anything at all like a shelf."

" . . . like a shelf," spoke an echo.

Another great bat beat past with almost soundless wings, a momentary shadow on the wall where their flashes sprayed light. It was as though some huge creature with spread arms leapt at them, and yet did not touch them, ghostly.

"A shadow has no impact," said Raymond, "but it is very alarming when it comes like that."

"Cut it out!" snapped Pete. "We'll say nothing about being alarmed till we're through. I ain't scared exactly, but I—well, I got the willies a mite. This is a fright of a place."

There was an excitement that sustained them, not to be denied. Following the thread to the left they came upon another chamber. At once they heard a definite plip-plop, plip-plop.

"Go easy," warned Pete. "There's water. There may be some darn pool here going plumb through to Australia. By gosh, this might sure be an alarming place for a person liable to get alarmed!"

They crept forward.

"Any shelf here?" asked Pete.

Raymond flicked his torch up and down on each side.

"I can't see anything."

"Your flash is failing," said Pete.

"So it is. I must have used it more than I knew."

"Then we'd better get back," said Pete. "If mine starts to fail too, and we have to get out on our knees, feeling them threads—" he did not finish the expression of that thought.

They turned, retracing their way by aid of the threads, back toward the outer world.

"We should be seeing daylight," Pete remarked, after what seemed a long journey. He switched off his flash. There was no gleam of day ahead. They heard Francesca draw a long breath.

"Queer!" exclaimed Raymond. "Well, we've got the threads." He took a few steps onward. "Come here and look!" he called to them.

He flicked on his feeble glimmer to guide them to where he stood. They reached his side.

"Put out your flash for a second, and see," he said.

There was a moment in darkness. Then they saw the opening of the cave sure enough, but it framed not the light of day on the painted slopes across the gulch. It showed only, along the top of the crags across the intervening valley, a black, irregular sky line and over it a belt of stars. They had been fumbling and peering in the caves longer than they had realized.

They were very silent round their fire in the meadow that night. For they lit a fire and cooked, and ate, heedless whether they had been pursued or not, heedless whether, somewhere near, were the three crooks of Sink searching for them. That time in the caves had given them a contempt for such a menace. They all felt tremendously elated, proud of themselves, though they did not say so one to another. Each, deep in thought, sat there, dwelling still on the emotions of the great caverns. The feeling was that they were still there, in the heart of the range. The rustle of the trees sounded strange, as from another world.

Francesca rose and left the camp, moving away into the star-sheen. They heard her talking to her horse, then she came back, riding it without a saddle. She passed them and went on toward the glade's opening to look back over the desert, and listen in the night, under the stars. Within an hour she returned, dropped from her horse and dismissed it with a smack on the haunch. Then she stepped into the radiance of the little campfire.

"I've been thinking," she announced. "That Don Hernando might not go to shelter in the big cave. It is obvious to see, but there is a little one just beyond with only a small entrance. If there's water in it, it is probably the one that the Indians went into with Don Hernando."

But none of them felt, somehow, any impulse to go cave-exploring that night without a pocketful of spare batteries. After all, beyond the smaller opening there might be hollows as vast as there were in the cave they had already visited together.

"The morning will do, I guess," said Pete.

"The gold will keep, if it's there," said Raymond.

"The caves will keep for ever," said Francesca, quietly, as if they had hushed her very spirit.

Raymond looked at her thoughtfully. She tremendously interested him. Pete's air was of taking her for granted, casual. On her side, Raymond was simply Pete's partner. The little savage in her was happy just by being near Pete who had unconsciously enraptured her at first sight. But Raymond found something romantic in this queer product of the tipis and the schools. Her presence there gave an additional touch of unreality to it all. He was not a Westerner, only a visitor to the West from time to time. Back in Eastern cities he would recall her, that untamed Indian girl with an oddly winning temperament, and the large black eyes.

CHAPTER XI

EUREKA!

THEY might have been living there a long time by the way they felt when, in the morning, they walked across that long swerve of polished rock below the sheer cliff. It was familiar under their feet as they trod up it, past the stupendous gape of the great cave to the lesser one, or the one, at least, with the smaller entrance. This time they took the precaution to carry spare batteries for their flashlights.

"I feel as if I should take my hat off going in," said Pete, "the same as church. That Don Greaser Benevente sure had no difficulty in thinking up a cathedral to liken to it all. One thousand cathedrals in one, I guess, and then some."

As they walked in abreast with firm tread the two men switched on their torches. Immediately they stood still with a shock. The shock was not because of the awesome implications of the place; it was because of an unexpected touch of modernity. For there, in front of them, clear in their lights and the light of outer day also, which penetrated thus far, was a long rough trestle table made of split cedar. They advanced to it, looked at it curiously.

"I got it!" exclaimed Pete. "This is where the doc and his assistants did the ticklish work of piecing the discoveries together. Guess they came in here for the cool. Must have had a lamp, of course."

Yes, that was clearly the solution. There even lay, at one end of the table, the pasteboard back of a writing-pad, with pencil jottings on it: "Package A: Turquoise pendant; B, Six spear-heads; C . . . " an illegible scrawl followed. Evidently Hesketh James was a sad one at calligraphy if this was his. Then there was another scrawl: "Be sure to tell them to load case marked X with very special care."

"Was that our gold-dust?" asked Pete, and laughed.

"It was probably some fragile thing, some pottery he was fussy about," said Raymond.

Plip-plop went a water drop.

"Water in here too," said Raymond. "That made it all the better workroom for them. Where is it?"

They went in search of the water and found a trickle down a wall, gathering into a bead and then falling. The bead and the drop; the bead and the drop; on and on, followed by that plip-plop. There was a little pool there, trough-like.

"It don't run out over the floor," remarked Pete. "It must go out through some crack below. Yes, there it goes. That is maybe what we watered at, percolating through other cracks. Well, this is sure some apartment house."

He raised his hat and scratched the top of his head, gazing round at the great natural chamber.

"Come on, let's make a tour of it," said he, "and tap the walls as we go for a secret hiding place behind the old oak panels."

They passed on from where the water trickled down a stalactite that made a dropper for it. The outer daylight from the arch was still with them, though not making the place bright enough for a thorough examination without their electric flashlights.

"Shelf!" said Pete. "No shelf here. Cracks, fissures, bits of fret-work sticking down from the roof, but no shelf."

They passed into the rear of the cave. There another arch showed. Pete stooped and entered. It was so low, that arch, that when he passed through the others only saw him from feet to waist. He did not move on. He remained there, turning round and round. Then he bent and they saw his face peering out at them.

"Come in and look," he suggested.

His voice excited them. Raymond went first, Francesca following, stooping and rising after the white men with a set expression on her face.

"Just a leetle clothes closet," observed Pete.

Soon, with expectations being thus raised and dashed, their nerves would become frayed. The two flashlights showed all there was to be seen.

"No shelves in it, though," said Raymond.

"No. No hooks, no hangers, no shelves," said Pete.

"What's that?" asked Francesca, pointing to a corner of the roof.

"Aw, get out! It's just a bat hanging by one of its darn claws. He's wakening. He'll be in our faces in a second. I hate the darn things. They ain't natural—mice with wings; and these fellows are as big as pack-rats!"

They made egress again into the outer cave and continued round its walls, their torches flashing now low, now high, as high as they could send the joint beams.

"No threads to guide us here," remarked Pete.

"Look!" exclaimed Francesca.

"At what?" asked Pete.

"Look!" and she pointed. "Put both your lights up there."

"I saw that too," said Raymond, "but I thought it was a crack. Yes, it does slope behind. It's—"

"It's a shelf!" cried out Pete. "It's a shelf in a manner of speaking, but nobody need think it is a handful of aces. It's only a two-spot, I guess, same as we shone our lights on in the big cave. All the same, we'd always regret if we didn't take a look at it. Give me a shoulder up, Ray."

"You could pull over the trestle table," said Francesca.

"So we could. It would be handier. There might be a stinging lizard waiting up there for rubber-necking strangers."

So they dragged the table over and the two men clambered up. It was then Francesca, below, who had the suspense. The two remained above near the level of the slit in the wall, each drawing apart from the other. They moved slowly, with a slowness occasioned by more than the oscillation of their perch. The Indian girl waited anxiously.

"GOSH!" she heard Pete say. "If I'm not much mistaken here is a fragment of an old original pannier still intact among it. Oh, if it ain't broken in my fingers. See, here is another piece, Ray. Yes, it's a kind of wickerwork. The Injuns still make it for packing. That bit went to nothing too."

Raymond looked down.

"We've got it, Francesca Xavier!" he said. "You were right. Here, I'm coming down for a minute. I want a drink."

He squatted to the table, slipped to the ground, and went to where the tip-tap of water counted the eternal moments in that cave. Flashlight in left hand, he cupped his right at that natural tank and drank.

"Ice-cold," he said, hardly aware of what he said. The temperature of that water was a secondary matter in his mind then.

When he turned, Pete was seated on the edge of the trestle where they had placed it against the wall. He was holding out a hand filled with the precious yellow metal that the Indians had prized less than their blue and their green mottled stones. Then he took off his hat, and ran a hand backward through his hair, blew out a sudden, gusty breath.

"Don Hernando," he said, "I take it all back. I freely admit that I was some dubious of you, but I take it all back. You were no happy talker. It was straight goods and no josh you fed to Coronado. I needed my share in this badly—badly, señor—if you only knew. I hope you may be resting in peace, wherever you are." Then suddenly he flapped his hat before him, and: "Beat it! Beat it!" he whooped at a great bat that was making circles like a glittering black halo round his head.

Francesca went away for a blanket to lay upon the table, so that they might scoop off that ledge, that shelf, their treasure of gold dust and nuggets. And in the suffused light of that interior, gathering and patting their discovery with cupped hands, they were soon preyed upon by a feeling of unreality. It was all so utterly still, with a stillness accentuated by that intermittent water drop.

"I wonder where was the wonderful old river bars, and where was the nooks and corners where they got all this," said Pete. "Five little burros!"

Francesca came back with a bundle of their blankets. They had to distribute the hoard so as to arrive at any notion of its amount. Pete lifted a blanket by its corners, the dust they had put in it settling together in the middle as he did so, sagging heavily down.

"All of fifty pounds," said he.

"And that's away less than a quarter of it," said Raymond, staring at him.

They were both in a tense state. They were trembling indeed with the gold fever.

"Say, oh, say," broke out Pete, "who was the guy that had the dough? Greasus, or some such name. Rich as Greasus! When we go to weighing this stuff in they'll be itching to know where we've been placering, and watching us to see if we go back for more. But we're down to bedrock on that shelf, though sure so blasé on the stuff we don't need a little brush to sweep it clean."

Lifting one bundle and another, made out of one of the blankets easily spared for that service, Pete commented:

"Funny we didn't think of the essential thing in our outfit—sacks to pack it away in. Guess we must have had this here sub-conscious hunch we wasn't going to get it! If so, it was a bogus hunch."

They stood in turn like animate weighing machines, with that expression as of listening for a sound, or sniffing for a scent, that accompanies such computations. They decided they had somewhere about three hundred pounds weight.

"Gee-whiz!" said Pete. "We can't both be out in the reckoning. I guess we're rich!"

"I guess we are," said Raymond.

He again went over to where the water fell with its eternal splash. Suddenly he stopped, turned, and came hastening back.

"Say—" he began.

"Say on!"

"They're outside. They've made it. One of us should have kept watch on the edge of the range while the others looked for the treasure."

"They're outside!"

"You bet you. And now for the tug-of-war!"

CHAPTER XII

GOOD-BY, FRANCESCA

"WHO is it you saw?" asked Pete.

"The Springheel man. I saw him springheeling away from the entrance. I could tell by his gait he'd spotted us."

"Well, I'm not exactly sorry. I hated sheltering under the coat-tails of the Hesketh James' outfit. No, I'm not exactly sorry. We'll maybe teach them not to butt in."

"I can't think how they made it without us seeing them," said Raymond. "We've looked out over the desert every time we came on the ledges here."

"True. But we don't know how time passes when we get all het up on our search. You didn't notice anything when you went for the blankets, Francesca?"

"No," she said. Her voice sounded strained to their ears. "They must have followed me when I turned back again."

"Ah well, I'm glad to let 'em see we ain't scared even with no more witnesses around than bats or lizards," said Pete.

They left the trestle where, in their home-made sacks, the gold and nuggets lay. They passed to the cave mouth to pry for a sight of the enemy. Eyes on the alert they walked out. Nothing! Nobody! Springheels scuttling away from the cave might have been only imagined by Raymond.

And then suddenly a sharp, deep crash of a rifle broke in the sunny silence. Francesca made a sound, a low moan.

"Oh!" she said. "Oh . . . Pete . . . "

Her voice would remain in their memories for ever. She fell face forward, and then lay quiet.

Almost at the same moment the others dropped to their knees. But she had fallen full length, whereas they had merely dropped by natural strategy. A second shot was not fired. Evidently they were out of sight of the person who aimed.

Francesca—with whom it had been, as the phrase is, caps over the windmills on seeing Pete at her people's rancheree—had been shot in the chest. On either side of her Raymond and Pete bent, now turning her over to see what they could do, next looking up, faces set and rigid, realizing the truth.

"She's dead!" said Pete.

Was it, perhaps, premonition of this that had made her dislike the caves, rather than just their creepy feeling? So they wondered now. Even as they were thus thinking there came another shot, but at that moment Raymond had moved. It had, belike, been aimed at him, and well. A flake of rock flew where he had been and, behind, another flake splintered off the cliff from the ricochet.

"Here," said he, "we've got to keep down low. Let's drag her back into the cave, Pete. We may be held up in it till night comes and we don't want to see buzzards before dark, and hear coyotes after dark."

Stooping low they dragged the body into the cave.

"Well, she's done with it," said Pete. He bent over her, his voice thick and unnatural when he spoke. "She was a good scout. She was sure a good scout."

Then he turned and shook his fist toward the cave's opening.

"We'll get you yet, you—buzzards!" he exploded. "We'll get you properly for this, you—"

A stream of profanity poured from his lips. Actually it was poor Francesca's funeral oration, a bitter elegy.

Disconsolate, dejected, they waited, watching for the first shadow or sign of anyone approaching. They decided to put a pile of stones on that little stiffening body, so that it might not later be found by prowling coyotes. Then Pete had an idea.

"Here," he said, "we know that there's no way out at the sides of this cave, but I've often heard that such places are all honeycombed. We didn't climb up to where that water drip comes down to see if there is a chimney above. It may lead up and over into the big caves. Come on and give me a back up to it."

Over at the place of the drip Raymond leant to the wall, put a palm on it, and steadied. And cautiously Pete got up on his hips, then on his shoulders.

"All right?" he asked.

"All right. I'm braced."

Pete switched on his torch and looked up.

"Yes," he said. "I can get a hold on this stalactite thing and stand beween it and the wall, it's like a chimney. It's just a chance. Now I'm going to take off, Ray."

"All right."

He dragged himself up. Raymond, peering after him, could see a tangle of legs and shadow in the suffused glow of the electric torch. Pete's voice came drifting down.

"Yes, there's room to climb here. I'll see what I can do. There may be a hole into the next caves. You go back to the mouth and keep watch. They might try a rush."

So Raymond stole back to the edge of the cave mouth where he could see at a moment if any shadow fell of one trying to enter. He was stunned by the death of Francesca. That little Indian girl, graceful as a gazelle, so strange a product of the Indian camps and the mission school, had come to be part of his everyday life here. The low moan with which she died haunted him.

NOT a sound but the plip-plop from that stalactite at the natural trough. Suddenly he heard the bark of a shot. Then silence. Then another shot. There he crouched, waiting. And at last there was a scraping noise from the chimney over the place where the water fell.

"Hullo, Ray!" came Pete's voice.

"Hullo!"

"You're there. Say, stand right under this darn piece of rock till I can slither down and get on your shoulder."

In another moment he was down.

"Did you hear the shots?" he asked.

"I did."

"That was for Francesca," said Pete grimly.

"What was it?"

"Well, this don't lead into the next cave. But I found a hole in the cliff where I could look down and see it all. Laramie I didn't see at all—guess he's with the horses. Peeping Tom was setting just on the other side of some bowlders, facing here, spying in between them. It's wonderful what you can do with a Colt, Ray. I got him."

"You got him!"

"You bet you. That was for Francesca! She was sure a good little scout. Next minute Springheels came creeping along, from watching the big cave, I guess, like as if he was playing from base to base; and when there was no bowlders to hug he got down on his hands and knees. I thought he was going to turn around and go back for Laramie, so I took a chance at him, but he was too far off. It would have needed your sporting rifle. I shouldn't be surprised if he got a splinter of rock in him, though, the way he zipped back. He sure travelled from sight."

"So we're two to two now," said Raymond.

"Fifty-fifty is the game," agreed Pete. "And how about sneaking out now? Springheels has gone for Laramie, I guess. The coast must be clear."

They got the loads upon their backs.

"Let me go first," said Raymond.

"Why that?" asked Pete.

"They may shoot, and I got you into this trouble. It is up to me to go first."

"Shucks! I ain't got over the ignominy of sneaking away from Pile of Rocks under cover of that big outfit of research folks. I want to let them see that I ain't scared of them."

Out they went but nothing happened. There was only the big sky overhead empty of clouds, and a hawk circling in space. Back a little way they saw something out of place among the rocks and at once were alert. It did not move. It was the fallen Peeping Tom.

Not a sign of any one. The gulch below might have been on Robinson Crusoe's island instead of on the American continent. They got down low enough, scrambling over just where they were instead of returning along the swerves of polished rock, to see the texture of the bark on the near trees, the plated-looking old poplars, the lined cedars. They came to the edge of grass.

It looked as though the one fatality had sufficed for the enemy, though to be sure they had come down cannily, using every bowlder warily for cover, descending where these were most piled. A return to the caves, and back again, brought no shot. The "stuff" was safely removed to the gulch ready to load when they got their horses. The big hawk was circling lower, looking at that motionless figure. Springheels and Laramie had not ventured back yet to cover it with the stone cairn of desert burial.

Back again in the bottoms, Raymond and Pete wondered if here was a new ruse, if the enemy had decided to drive off the horses and leave them there as men marooned. The day was intensely still. There was a sense as of waiting for something, in the very atmosphere, it seemed to them. But to their astonishment, stealthily creeping up to where they had left their pack-saddles and dunnage, they found all untouched, apparently, by any save Francesca when she had gone down for the blankets before the coming of the crooked trio.

"I know," said Pete.

"I'm glad you do," said Raymond, gazing round tensely, wishing he had eyes in the back of his head, momentarily expecting a shot.

"They don't know this gulch runs away back. They think it's just a pocket and that all they got to do now is wait for us on the desert edge till we come out."

And then there was a sudden crash that made them start. But it was of no rifle. It was as of a battalion of rifles; it was as of heavy artillery. It was a rend of thunder, accompanied by a glare of lightning. At once there came a rub-a-dub of hoofs in the bottoms.

Pete peered down.

"It's only our bunch of horses!" he ejaculated. "I'm right, I guess. They've got theirs picketted well at the opening, and there they will wait for us for a cinch, after the welcome they got rubber-necking too close in."

Had he surmised rightly or wrongly was not, however, the main matter at that moment. The main matter was to get their horses, and load, and go while the going was good, if the going was good.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CRACK IN THE WALL

BY THE way Don Hernando had gone, by the way the strangely lovable, dark-eyed Francesca had told them of, they were going now. But the day's end called a halt to their back door exit, under great cliffs was cloudy night and impenetrable gloom. At intervals a lightning flash lit castellated ridge and veined wall of precipice, and threw wedges of light and shade, bizarre, terrific, round them.

With the first, thin stain of dawn overhead they continued, and when the cliffs once more stood up silent and blank to view they found that they were truly in no cul-de-sac. They had mounted a sweep of ages-old rubble; and there, beyond, was a crack in the next fronting cliff. All the slopes to right swerved down toward it. After cloud bursts that would be the water's exit. Dante saw Inferno like that. Like that Doré drew it.

It was at that place, cresting the rubble and looking on, that Raymond stumbled. He was still stiff from his uncomfortable bed of the night, not yet limbered up, and had turned his ankle on a stone so that he jogged down. That stumble, however, saved him. Even as he dipped, and tried to prevent a fall, a rifle crashed behind. The bullet intended for him went past with a buzz as of the swiftest humming-bird; and Francesca's horse fell with it in its head.

"Down! Down!" urged Pete. "Down into that dip—and the cañon."

"They'll climb to here, and have us potted then for sure," said Raymond.

"No, no. I'll wait here till you get fair in the gulch. Grab these lines."

He thrust into Raymond's hand the lines of the horses he held. And with that he dropped low.

"Go on," he urged.

It was no moment for argument over a detail in the campaign. Raymond passed at once down the rattling slope into the the big basin, and headed on toward the chasm, one of the horses at first hanging back so that he walked with arm out behind him, lines taut. But the others stepped up, and so the doubtful one followed. Raymond led them, the little stones clattering from their hoofs. In the bottom of the gorge was a very diminutive creek, and, their terror over, they all halted to drink, with a great noise of suction, the shallow water.

It was just playing round his shoe-soles. As they drank, Raymond looked up at the ridge and saw Pete, crouched there, take off his hat and raise it slowly over the rim. Crash came a rifle report. The hat wavered a moment in Pete's finger hold, but at once he was up, shoulder high to the crest. His arm went up, then down, and the Colt spoke.

At this the horses made hardly any fuss, merely raised their heads, then went on drinking.

"Come on, you," Raymond said to them.

He waded out into the chasm. There it lay below and beyond him, simply a great rent, a fissure in the Blue Range, two walls, with this drainage from the limestone caves making an inch-deep stream of water across it. He drove the horses ahead of him now, instead of hauling at their lines, swinging to the saddle. Click, click, and splash, splash they went, for the floor of the cañon was not of great bowlders but of pebbles, almost like a causeway.

Then over his shoulder he looked again to see how Pete fared, if, leaving the horses there, he'd have to clamber back to his aid. But no. His partner had the situation in hand. Just as Raymond looked up that time, Pete fired again and then, dropping, at once slithered down the slope, rose in a half-crouch, and came rattling into the chasm. But it was not of what he had done he had anything to say to begin with. He looked at these old rock walls. He looked ahead at that twisting fissure.

"Gosh, what a place!" he exclaimed.

"Did you get one of them?" asked Raymond.

"No, dang it. It was only horse for horse. Springheels dodged back as I got the bead on him, and his cayuse got it. They were just at the end of the woods and took cover, too good cover; but I held them. Guess they won't come on immediately. That's what I fired the last shot for, fired at nothing in particular, to let them know I was still there."

A blaze of lightning came again; the thunder crashed, and in that fissure seemed to compress all its sound, a rocky, reverberating detonation. Tortuously the slit went on so that always, before them, the appearance was of an end; but always, as they progressed, another reach opened to view. The walls soared to a matter of five hundred feet; irregular walls, but utterly unscalable in any place, sometimes with projecting bastions that narrowed the slot to no more than twenty feet from as far apart as thirty or so. And obviously where they narrowed the water deepened. But even in these places it was not near knee high to the horses.

Looking up they saw the sky of the hue of a dirty ceiling, grey and forbidding; and continuously through that grey there went sulphurous coils, and then the lightning blazed. Then the rain! It came with a descending hiss. It came down a grey pall. "The heavens opened" was true of that downpour.

Abruptly Pete turned to Raymond.

"Say!" he broke out.

"What?"

But Pete said no more. He kept it to himself. Yet Raymond knew what had been in his mind. What had been a percolating inch of water on the causeway-like floor of the cleft, a percolating inch that had but stretched across the middle of the chasm when they entered it, now ran from wall to wall. It was over the fetlocks of the horses at the broad parts. They splashed in it. At the narrow ones they labored as horses will, fumbled, heads lowered, for footing. Don Hernando had given no details of the way his Indian friends had led him out of the back door as it were of the Blue Range. Francesca had told them more, told them of this cañon; but not how long it was. Only she had mentioned that if one was caught after a cloudburst it was in the nature of a death-trap.

Then Pete did speak.

"It's all of a couple of feet deep now," he said. His voice was harsh.

"Yes," said Raymond.

That was all. He had no more to say. There was nothing to talk about. If they tried to go more quickly they would only have horse trouble, a stumble that might mean a fall, a broken leg, and a horse to be shot. And this would be a wild place to change packs, with that ever increasing ribbon of water swirling along. Still the lightning blazed and the thunder resounded. The hiss of the rain kept on without cessation. Indeed it seemed, if that were possible, to increase in intensity.

"Gosh!" grunted Pete.

Raymond said nothing, but his teeth gritted close and his jaw tightened. The sorrel mare was in the lead, and suddenly she was out of her depth, afloat, plunging, and the others plunging after her. But it was only that they had come to a place where the gorge dipped. Yet that brief incident, at that declivity in the cañon's floor, was a hint to them of what it would be like were the water to rise another foot. Then all would be afloat, not only in a place where the bed dipped. But they needed no such incident to impress on their minds the danger they were in. There was a seething sound in the water added to the hiss of the rain. Then from behind came a noise like wind in trees, drawing closer.

CHAPTER XIV

STRANGERS IN TOWN

THEY came to the end of a long portion of the deep ravine and took the turn, and so shut off from their ears that sinister, pursuing sigh. Ahead there was a distinct dropping down of the cañon edges. This time it was not due merely to perspective. Here they would surely have been afloat had it not been that the chasm widened. From being awash to the cinch-straps the horses once more were only knee deep, plugging on as if they knew their own salvation was in so doing.

And then up, up came the water. They were swimming, they were scrambling to a foothold on the uneven way. One more bend. One wall of the cañon dipped down, and round its deckle edge of ragged rock they could see straight out into nothing—into immensity, into the further deluge. From behind that sound as of wind in the trees, but harsher, suddenly reached them again. Under the dropping edge of the wall to left was a shelving bank. The broadening cañon had at last a beach, a pebbly ridge, and above that was a slope. The pack-ponies were at it, their heads rising and falling in a valiant attempt to gain foot-hold. Weary, they looked like squirrels on a cruel revolving wheel.

The hiss behind rose to a sibilant roar. Canted forward in the saddles, the two riders shouted encouragement to their mounts, also turned to that shelving rise. The impact of the deepening water smote on the haunches, drove them aslant up the slope even as they floundered on it. The pack-ponies had made it.

"Up! Up! Good lad, good lad!"

The riders were out of the saddles with a spring, and on to the bank, reins in hand, scrambling ahead of the beasts that had brought them through. And below, and past them, went a curling fronted wall of deep water, lapping into that shelving bank, undermining it afresh, swirling on.

They climbed to the top and there all stood stock still, horses and men. Done! They'd had enough. The horses grouped, tails pendent, heads drooping. There was no wind to turn their backs to. There was just the straight steel-gray pour of the rain. The men looked on through the gleaming haze of it and saw the water passing on and disappearing over a fall where the other wall of the gulch also dropped abruptly down. And then, almost as sudden as it had come, the rain ceased. Its splash and hiss was over. There was only the rumble and bellow of these compressed waters.

"Look! Look, for the love of—"

Pete was back on the bank side. Wallowing on the flow came a horse, spinning this way and that. It crashed against the cliff across from them, suddenly ceased to struggle, and was swept on. Then they saw something else similarly tossed to and fro in that now turbulent and seemingly exultant flow. The dead face of Laramie gleamed a moment up at them, a long raw weal over the forehead, and then he too rolled as the horse had rolled and was carried away like some mere bobbing, big marionette.

"He got after us alone, then," said Raymond. "I thought he was the best of the bunch, the one with the sand—"

"Look!" cried out Pete again.

But even as he spoke, craning out from their bank, what had brought that exclamation from him was heaved almost under them: A horse, still struggling, with dilated nostrils and glaring eyes. It came down at great momentum, striving to get out of the main current and make the bank where they stood. They scrambled down ready, if a whirl of the current brought it their way, to grab the lines in the hope of getting it up the bank.

Yet something impeded it. Something trailed and bumped beside it. They saw a foot in the stirrup. It was Springheels, bruised, beaten. In a vain effort to encourage the horse to the bank both men held out their hands to it. It saw. It swung its head to them, but the man—nay, the body—trailing at the stirrup impeded it.

"It's got a leg broken!" said Pete.

Pulling his gun he smashed a bullet into its head just as, failing to make the bank, it was carried off again in a rush of foam. The torrent roared on. They climbed back to where their horses stood motionless, patient.

When you look at the large-scale maps of these parts you see them dotted every here and there with disconnected lines, and looking to the margin to discover their significance you see the explanation thus: *Intermittent streams*. Some of them can mean such a place as that below the Blue Range. *Dry arroyos* others call them. And sometimes—after cloud-bursts—they are wet.

Well, in the bedway of one of these intermittent streams there will be, silted over with sand and pebbles, the bodies of Laramie and Springheels.

"I can't go alone—I haven't the savvey." Raymond recalled how he had said that to Pete Scanlan when divulging to him the old story of Don Hernando Benevente. And Pete's presence was consolation to him now. From sand-storm to cloud-burst they had faced the music together. And Pete would get them through that great vista of space lying before them, now steaming pearly to the sun.

It was, indeed, but three days later that the people of Jackson saw two somewhat tough-looking strangers ride into their "city" below the mesa. Past the artesian wells and the alfalfa fields they came to the dozen little bungalows, the street where are the general store, the drug-store, the two hotels, and no less than two banks. The inhabitants of the place eyed them curiously but asked no questions. Often, sequestered though it is, queer strangers drop into Jackson out of the sunshine, or the cloud-bursts.

Before one of the banks the strangers dismounted, and began to unpack. And then they entered to astonish the teller, to make him elevate his eyebrows in high curves, and then to get them down as he tried to accept them with a look of professional unconcern. It is a good adage that: "Ask no questions and you get no lies." He asked no questions; he only gave them opening for a statement.

"A rich placer-strike," said he. "A rich placer-strike this, gentlemen."

"You've said a mouthful," agreed Pete, pleasantly.

For what was the good of explaining that what they cashed in then was none of their own placering, but a very old treasure trove—none other than that of Don Hernando Benevente and the five little golden burros?

HUNTED:

A Fugitive from Justice in Exotic Lands

By HENRY LACOSSITT

THE man drove the car furiously. It streaked along the road through the night, skidded around curves, and swayed in the loose gravel. It reached the foothills of the Pyrenees.

Murder flew in its wake, trailing the driver, murder that had left a man dead at his desk in Paris, stabbed through the back. It urged the fugitive to speed, strained the engine of the little Fiat he had hired in a provincial town.

Several leagues behind him came the police, chasing the killer. They had trailed him from Paris, had arrived several hours after his departure, and had followed him in a powerful car. He felt they were coming; he often had been a fugitive and he sensed the man hunt.

Above him a late February snow-storm raged in the mountains. He felt the cold air press down from above and muffled his coat closer to his throat. He donned his gloves as the numbing wind began in gusts to oppose his ascension. Up, up, slowly, agonizingly slow, it seemed to him, crawled the little car. Far up in the mountains on a strip of road that rounded a ledge he saw, looking below, the tiny lights of the police car, moving slowly through the night. They were just beginning the rise through the foothills.

Fear seized him, maddening, panicky fear. He was desperate because the Fiat would not respond to his mood. It was not built for hill-climbing, but he had had no choice. It was the only car he could procure in his rush. He knew they were gaining, slowly but surely, on him. Could he beat them to the border?

He had reached the snow now. It stung his face, blinded him, filmed over the windshield, and he groped along. The minutes became years of agony. Perspiration started on his brow. He went slower now, blindly, his lights like the antenna of a great bug, feeling the way. Higher in the mountains he came to a division of the road, a Y that sent one ribbon trailing to the southeast and the other to the southwest. This was the place. He halted, struck a match and, shielding it close to him, looked at a pocket map. Yes, this was the place.

He got out of the car and drew three suitcases from the back seat. Then, turning the vehicle around, he started the engine, threw it in gear, and jumped out. The automobile rolled down the road, gaining speed, and hurtled over the edge of a cliff. He did not stop to listen for the crash, but started, along the road that led to the southwest, at a dead run, lugging his suitcases as best he could. He ran until fatigue stopped him, then dropped into the briskest walk he was able to summon.

He was a young man, not over thirty. His clothes were of a stylish and expensive cut and his shoes, scuffed and scarred now by the rocks of the road, were of a smart pattern. He wore a grey velour hat, pulled low over his eyes which, for all his youth, were not the eyes of youth. In the dim light of the dash as he sped over the roads in Southern France they might have appeared the eyes of an old man. But neither were they the eyes of age. They were cold, blue, dead eyes, unnatural eyes, cruel and sensual. They were keen, shrewd eyes, windows to a mind and heart that knew no kindly emotions, no scruples. They were shifting eyes that could gleam evilly with murderous emotion or bulge in abject terror.

Their cruelty and lustfulness were heightened by the curve of the nostrils and the curl of the lips, and his ears, small, seemed to have been pressed into his head. There was a prominent chin, but it was weak, purposeless. From a distance he appeared good looking, a rather debonair figure, but as he came closer and the subtle effect of his features took hold of you, there was an instinctive revulsion. You might have looked at him, fascinated, but the attraction was that of the basilisk.

He hurried through the snow, stumbling and staggering as ruts and rocks threw him off balance. He was tired, dog-tired, but panic pricked him and he went on. Then, coming to a curve where, on either side, the trees had been chopped away, he halted. This too, was the place. He walked to one side of the road and struck three matches, extinguishing each before he lighted the next. It worked.

From the trees walked a tall man, bundled heavily with outergarments, but exposing his grizzled head to the storm with only a Basque cap to protect it.

"Señor Wisner?" he questioned.

"Si."

"Come with me. All is arranged."

The two men entered the forest. They had not gone far when the Basque stopped. Two horses were tethered to a tree. The suitcases were slung across one and the fugitive mounted it. The Basque swung astride the other and led the way down a game trail.

Gyp Wisner was smuggled across the border into Spain and temporary safety.

II

But it was not until he reached Barcelona and the sanctuary of a familiar dive near the waterfront of that hectic city that Gyp Wisner felt at ease. His panic had left him when he crossed the border, but he still was uneasy. He knew his pursuers would find the wrecked car on the road below the curve he had dropped it from, but he also knew that they, being national police, would not tarry long by it. They knew him and he knew them. They would sense his ruse quickly and it would not detain them long. But perhaps it would detain them long enough for him to catch a train at the little village lying on the southern fringe of the mountains and make his getaway before they notified the Spanish authorities. Evidently it did, for he made the trip to Barcelona without incident, although he was on edge throughout the journey.

Gyp Wisner was no ordinary crook. And in this short biography of him it is impossible to catalogue his entire activities. Suffice it to say that he was international in them and that, being so, was a source of annoyance and perturbation to the police of four great countries and a number of lesser ones.

Among his crimes was murder, of course, for no man with the eyes and other features that Gyp possessed would be beyond it. Rather it was a natural penchant. Murder meant nothing to him. Fear did; he was a slave to fear.

Likewise he was an excellent burglar. His technique at safes was more than good and he knew locks thoroughly. As a robber he also shone and as a swindler he had made some impressive successes. He was an American and began his career in the States.

He gravitated to New York from the middle-west. When the police were about to catch up with him, he escaped to England and pursued his trades there. But London likewise caught on to Gyp and he fled to Germany where Berlin offered a fertile field. In danger of capture he left the capital and fled south, out of Germany and through the states of central Europe and the Balkans. His travels eventually landed him more or less permanently in Paris where he began operations on a large scale. Also he had his closest call which sent him on his wild ride through Southern France and across the mountains into Spain.

He essayed a robbery that took him to the mansion of a wealthy French senator.

He had information that this gentleman had a large sum of money in a private safe at home. He was working on the safe when the senator, hearing a slight noise, had come in to investigate. Gyp had heard him outside the door and concealed himself in the folds of heavy curtains hanging before a big French window. As the man passed Gyp sprang out and buried his dirk deep in the Frenchman's back, at the same time throttling any cry with a grip on the man's throat. He had an abhorrence of any noise and he preferred to dirk his victims. He knew well how to prevent their screams while he was doing it.

Dragging the body to a desk, he sat it in a swivel chair and returned to his job. He was about to leave when the senator's wife, wondering at the long absence of her husband, and reinforced by servants, came to the room. Gyp, his dirk in his hand, had plunged into the group and through it, escaping.

But the character of his job and the general description given by the senator's wife identified him with the police and he had to leave Paris. His professional brethren had aided him, and he eluded capture. But the police were close behind him. He had paid dearly for the car in the little provincial town, leaving the train and hoping to throw his pursuers off the track, but they had kept close at his heels until he crossed the Spanish border. Of course they had notified the police along the way in France, but Gyp had earned his first name by his miraculous escapes.

He had been smuggled into Spain by the Basque who was well acquainted with activities such as Gyp and his ilk pursued, and made a tidy sum each year in aiding their exodus from France.

In Barcelona he found refuge. He had been there before for the city harbors many such characters. It is in Barcelona that communism is rampant, that smuggling flourishes, that crime is nursed and developed. So Gyp headed there and was received by an old crony, a retired smuggler who ran a café and gambling house, and who kept him in a back room of the place. But he grew careless.

ONE evening, feeling restive and fretting at his enforced idleness, he ventured out to the cafés. He still possessed a sizable portion of the loot he had obtained in the Paris murder job and he drank a great deal. Following that he gambled a great deal and lost. Entering a more pretentious cabaret, after his losses, he was in ugly mood. He sat down at a table and ordered a drink, looking for any kind of adventure. Glancing about he saw, seated next to a handsome young Spaniard, a dancing girl of unusual beauty.

Now Gyp rarely had much to do with women, but when he did it was intensive. He was both thrilled and afraid in their presence. He did not understand them, nor was he capable of doing so. They awed him, fascinated him, anaesthetized his otherwise shrewd mind and, if he saw one that particularly appealed to him, he could not but surrender to her charm. He resisted most of them, but the girl he saw stirred him. He wanted her. He arose and walked to where she and her companion were seated.

"May I dance?" he asked in his best Spanish.

The girl and man looked up. They both appraised him. The Spaniard glowered; the girl smiled. Obviously American, Gyp was attractive to her, if not physically, financially.

"Si, señor," she replied. "Muchisimo gusto."

Gyp bowed. He was handsome in a way and he knew how to act. He returned to his table and awaited the orchestra which soon began a Spanish schottische. Then he walked over to the girl's table. He was about to walk away with her when he caught the Spaniard's eye. It looked hatred at him. Gyp's mood, changed from ugliness to vaingloriousness, could not resist a play at bravado. He hesitated, returning the gaze. The girl waited, pleased at her paramour's jealousy of the American. The Spaniard dropped his eyes and Gyp danced.

He surrendered to her grace and attraction. The schottische stopped and the waltz began. The lights of the room, changing iridescently through all the colors, spangled the room. She was a lovely little thing, he thought. He would possess her. He would take her with him and leave Barcelona. He would—

His thoughts reached an aposiopesis when he saw the Spaniard. Gyp gazed over the girl's shoulder and saw him. Near him were other young men, all glaring menacingly. The American laughed. He would show them. They would do nothing at all. Swaggering, he accompanied the girl to the table, then asked if she would not go to his table with him. She assented. They started, when the Spaniard grabbed his arm.

"Señor! She is my woman!" cried the man.

Gyp did not answer immediately. He shot his cold, reptilian gaze into the Spaniard.

"Indeed," he said deliberately. "Who says so?"

"I say so."

Gyp's answer to that was a shrug after which he pushed the man in the face and sent him back in the seat. The Spaniard was up in an instant.

He lunged at Gyp, but the American knew about such things. He sidestepped the charge and drove the Spaniard back with a hard-driven right fist. Immediately he was beset by the others. One jumped on his back. He shook him off. Another rushed him and was knocked down. The companion of the girl, now recovered, was up again, crouched, knife in hand. The others held back. Gyp reached in his coat where his dirk, sheathed, was strapped.

He waited. The Spaniard grew tense and sprang. Gyp deftly eluded the streak of steel and struck. His dirk impaled the man's shoulder. The Spaniard shrieked in pain and Gyp struck with his left arm, knocking the man back and free of the dirk which cut as it withdrew.

There was pandemonium in the cabaret. The screams of the dancing girls and the excited shouts of the Spaniards brought a crowd from the street running to see what the fracas was all about. A group of seamen, thoroughly drunk, and excited by the fight, began one of their own, which soon spread to the other occupants of the place. Soon the café was filled with struggling, cursing men, while the women rushed for the door. Bottles crashed and chairs swung. The seamen were having the time of their lives. But at the door appeared the Spanish "Napoleons."

Gyp, having retired to a corner of the room, was watching the riot and enjoying it when he saw the officers. He looked around for the girl. He would escape with her. But she was gone. An instant later he saw her, talking to one of the police, and pointing to him. The slut! She was double-crossing him.

Looking hurriedly about he saw a window just above him. He clambered to the sill and jumped out, as a bullet splintered the wood at his side. He landed in a narrow street and ran madly until he came to his hiding place.

Safe again he took stock of his actions and wondered how he could have been such a fool. He had exposed himself and over a tawdry dance-hall woman. She would tell the police about him. She would describe him and he knew they had his description from the French national police. Why had he not been content to leave well enough alone? Now the Spaniards would have something for themselves to work on. He had stabbed the man. It was stupid.

His fear seized him. He would end in the chair or on the scaffold if he didn't watch out. Damn his soul! Had he no sense? It was all too dangerous, this fooling around. If he could get back to work, it would be better. If he could only do something. But he couldn't do anything now. Not now, with the Spanish and French both after him.

He thought of opium. He had used it before in similar circumstances. But he was afraid of the habit. Maybe if he could get good and drunk. No, he had to stay sober. But he couldn't sit idle and think. It was too terrible. He started.

The door burst open.

Gyp stifled a cry and saw that it was his protector the ancient Spaniard. The old man was crippled and he hobbled in in unnatural and grotesque hurry.

"*Por dios, amigo!*" he cried. "They have traced you! They will be here soon! You must go!"

Gyp's color left him.

"But where! Where can I go?"

"I do not know, but you must leave. Hurry! If they find you here it means me also. If—Ah, I know. Leave your luggage to me. Come!"

Through back streets and alleys, through dank, stinking basements, the old man led Gyp. They reached the wharves and turned south. Following the waterfront to the extreme end of the docks, they stopped before a ship. Then they went aboard and the old man called for the captain. This worthy soon appeared, an evil looking ruffian with a scar across his face. He was introduced to Gyp as Capitan Romero.

Just before dawn Gyp, hidden securely in the engine room, sailed from Barcelona.

III

TWO years in the Mediterranean, two years in which Gyp became powerful. Starting in as a mere apprentice in the smuggling trade aboard the *Cabo Spartel* and under Romero, he had become a virtuoso at the game and the real factor behind the phenomenal profits the ship produced. For Gyp was ingenious.

When he sailed from Barcelona that night in which terror bestrode his shoulders he had no idea of entering the business. He was too occupied with his thoughts and fears, and continued to be for several days thereafter. Escape! Escape was all his mind could imagine. But the soft charm of the sea and the adventurous milieu of carrying contraband about the Mediterranean lured and won him.

It was different from anything he had ever done, an absolute change of pace and activity. Before he had been cooped in cities whose streets were haunted with spectres in uniform, and he felt cramped. Here on the sea; sailing one day, at port the next, fleeing, escaping, planning, shrewdly outwitting without much risk—it was all absorbingly interesting, and it was not so dangerous.

With Romero's knowledge of the shores of the Mediterranean, its inlets and coves and obscure ports, the *Cabo Spartel*, a phenomenally fast ship, could elude the boats of the law and could slip away to nowhere. Gyp's life had always been one of flight, but never such glorious, such exhilarating, such fascinating flight as this. And it paid.

Gyp saw to that. With his weasel-like acumen he had uncovered other things to run as contraband. There were guns. Guns were necessary to the progress of the Riff war, were essential to the activities of the Druses. Guns had to be had when revolutions were planned in Albania, when the republics of the Caucasus were torn by civil war. Tobacco was all that the *Cabo* had carried before; now a diversified cargo reposed in its holds.

Of course the tobacco cargoes were maintained. They were loaded in Macedonia; at some obscure Greek Island, or even in the harbor of Piraeus, and then were taken west to a certain spot in the sea where they were transferred to the Spanish shipping fleets, whose little sloops and smacks would run them into Spain. Occasionally the fishermen were caught. They were usually fined and let go. The *Cabo*, which meant Gyp and, to a lesser degree now, Romero, reimbursed them for their fine, and they continued their work. Then there was dope.

Gyp's ingenuity had discovered this lucrative business. Narcotics always had been confined largely to the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. But —and it was a logical and simple conclusion for the shrewd Gyp—if there, why not in Spain, in Italy, in France? He got the tobacco in, why not the dope.

He found that hasheesh found its way into Egypt from the Far East and that Greece was shot through with dealers in narcotics. There was the supply. And he knew that the demand was in Spain, Italy, and France. He would not ship directly to Italy or France—he feared the consequences of coming in close contact to such vigilant governments—but he could and would get the stuff into Spain and then let matters take their course. He knew how easily the stuff would filter through. He used the fishing fleets for this trade too.

He made the necessary contacts in Egypt and Greece Hasheesh and opium came from Egypt and he procured heroin and other drugs from Greece. Gyp was enthused. Romero was happy. The *Cabo* brought huge profits to both.

But, naturally, with the growth of the trade after its original smashing success, there grew also the resistance of the law. The *Cabo Spartel* became a marked ship and only the ingenuity of Romero saved it from capture. Where before there had been only the usual opposition of local authorities, there now was the puissant and determined forces of the national governments, specially appointed men, picked and tried in service. Furthermore they were urged on by the furore at Geneva against contraband of all sorts, particularly narcotics.

Gyp felt the added pressure and so did Romero. Often there was no one to receive their stuff at the landing place and often they were warned just in time to escape a cutter. With the League of Nations in the fray they had other ships than those of the nations directly interested to fear. The British base at Malta was a nest of power to be avoided and watched.

With this situation and the added dangers, Gyp's enthusiasm waned. Especially after two running fights in which he had seen two of the crew shot down near him. It was too close to be comfortable. His old hunted feeling returned and told on his nerves. His recent cheerfulness left him and his old neurosis again attacked him. The subconscious in him told him to get out. His conscious instinct told him he would before long.

IT WAS in this state of mind that he sailed into a cove on the coast of Tunisia near the Fratelli Rocks one night in late August. The *Cabo* was carrying rifles which were to be taken from there to the Riff armies by caravan. It was a particularly large shipment and the *Cabo* had just discharged an immense cargo of narcotics to the fishing fleets at great profit. It had been an eminently successful voyage.

Gyp was rowed ashore and walked to a little windowless shack, seemingly abandoned, which stood near the shore. The night was without moon and in the thick murk, barely illumined by the bright stars, the little building was barely discernible. But Gyp knew where it was. He had been there before. He walked to the door and knocked. The door slowly opened and he was admitted.

At a great rough table on which a sputtering candle gave a flickering light, two men were seated. The third occupant of the shack had opened the door for Gyp. One of the men was a Frenchman, one a Spaniard, and the other, who had admitted Gyp, obviously a North African Arab, by his garb and face. The Frenchman spoke, in English.

"Good evening, Mr. Wisner, we've been expecting you."

"A little late this trip, Desieux. They're after us, you know."

"So I hear, but you seem to elude them successfully. Have you the arms?"

"Of course. Have you the boats to unload them."

"In the rock inlets, Mr. Wisner, we have enough boats to unload three ships."

"Then we'd better get busy."

Gyp sent his boatman back to Romero to tell him that all was in order, Desieux showed where the boats were, and the crew of the *Cabo* went to work. Romero inspected the unloading of the ship, while the Spaniard was ashore to meet the boatloads of guns. The guns were stored in the innumerable grottoes beneath the crags along the shore, from where they would be taken the following night. Gyp, Desieux, and the Arab talked.

"How's the war going?" asked the American, lighting a cigarette.

"Well enough," answered Desieux, who produced a bottle of cognac and poured three glasses.

"Really any chance for the Riffs?" asked Gyp.

"Mr. Wisner, it is hardly credible that a small mountain tribe, unaided, can defy indefinitely the armies of France and Spain."

"Maybe not, but they've done pretty well at it so far. And how about the rest of the country? How about the Moors and the Algerians? I heard that old Abd-el-what's-his-name was trying to swing their support."

"True enough, Mr. Wisner, but the French and Spanish have not been idle either. Money, as you Americans say, talks, and the heads of the tribes have been talking French and Spanish."

"Oh, I see," remarked Gyp, as something he could understand definitely came up, "but," he continued as his mind grasped the situation and became speculative, "if they do that with them why not with the Riffs?"

"You have a keen mind, Mr. Wisner. This is the last time you will ever sell me rifles for the Riffs."

"How's that?"

"I hear from my friends in France and

Spain (and they never fail me) that the two governments will talk to Abd-el-Azar as they talked to the rest, and our friend Hassanein here, who has just returned from the Riff lines, tells me that the chief will accept."

"Well, well, that's tough. It shoots our little game here to hell."

"So it does, Mr. Wisner, but perhaps we can profit by it."

"How?"

"Well, my friend, the fact is that the deal is already closed and the agreement made. They will ship the specie from France. To it will be added the specie from Spain. It will be taken to Algeciras and then shipped across the straits to Tangier, where it is to be deposited in banks, perhaps some in other cities as well, which banks will, in turn, issue currency to cover the amount and pay the tribesmen. The chief, of course, will get the most and then obligingly allow himself to be captured and deported to some comfortable spot where he will live out his age.

"Now, Mr. Wisner, the French and Spanish are rather sensitive about all this. They will ship the specie quietly. There will be few guards because it would mean a loss of prestige if it were publicly known they could not suppress the Riffs. Hence they will make the shipment as inconspicuously as possible. Suppose I were to put you in touch with a friend of mine who is watching the business. Suppose you received the necessary information and that the *Cabo,* fully armed and equipped were lying outside the harbor of Algeciras when the specie ship sailed out. Few guards, all quiet. Then you and Romero know enough about escape. I'll meet you in Casablanca where we may have mutual interests to distribute among ourselves."

Gyp had been following him with interest. He decided to accept, but with reservations he made only to himself. Here, indeed, occurred to him a means of leaving the smuggling game, profiting by it, and living comfortably the rest of his life. He announced his willingness to steal the bribe.

"But Mr. Wisner, you know me very well, and I want you to be in Casablanca. If you are not there—well, I know you very well. Suppose the French knew Gyp Wisner was on the *Cabo?*"

Gyp assured Desieux that he would be in Casablanca, took the address of the person referred to, and left.

But the man was either mad or simple. Did he take him for a fool? Did he think that they would take all the risk and give him part of the gravy? Decidedly that was what they would not do. He had other plans. He told Romero to proceed to Port Said for opium.

They reached a point west of the city and dropped anchor in an open bay that hid them from view up and down the coast. The crew went ashore and walked to the Port, leaving Romero and Gyp aboard.

"Capitan," said Gyp when they were alone, "the profits have been unusually large this trip. Do you not think that we should get our share before the crew is given theirs. They are dolts and louts. I owe it to you for saving my life at Barcelona and you owe it to me for making your business. We have been firm friends and mutually beneficial. Suppose we divide first before we divide for all?"

"Your suggestion is excellent, Señor Wisner," said Romero and they went to the office of the ship between their cabins.

There was the ship's safe, a strong and modern affair that even Gyp would have been troubled in opening. Romero, who had the combination walked over to the safe and squatted before the dials.

Gyp watched, narrowly. His hand stole inside his coat. The captain was absorbed. Gyp set himself in his chair. He sprang.

A few minutes later Gyp, with bulging grips and his dirk now quite clean, slipped over the side. A little later and he was in the Port. An hour later and he was on the train for Alexandria.

The police investigated the deserted derelict a week later and found Romero's body. An Arab fisherman testified that he had heard a man scream the night the ship had cast anchor. Nothing was done. The crew was never found.

Gyp Wisner, while all this was going on, was in a first class cabin, bound for Marseilles.

IV

THERE was a fiesta in Tangier.

The little city breathed a holiday atmosphere. The cafés spruced up and added a waiter or two to their staffs. From Algeciras came the Spanish boats bringing vacationists from Sevilla, Cordova, Madrid, Valencia, all intent on the celebration and anticipating the thrill that the small, but cosmopolitan town, an orphan of the nations, could give. The fiesta would last but one night, ending sometime in the early morning, when the revelers would retire to the great Kursaals to finish the evening in hilarious abandon. It commemorated the discovery of America and made obeisance to the memory of Ferdinand and Isabella. Also it kept a custom dating from the ancient, Iberian peoples and maintained by the later inhabitants of the peninsula. It fell on Columbus day.

The Spanish population, of course, were most interested. But the other inhabitants, French, Moorish, English, or German, also were enthused. It meant an influx of visitors from Spain, perhaps a visitation of bored and munificent tourists, and a grand rise in the price of everything.

Only one thing served to mar the enthusiasm of the occasion. From the Spanish front came the body of beloved Capitan Alejandro Romero, who had been killed in battle with the Riffs. The dashing *capitan*, favorite of women, admired of men, handsome, debonair, romantic, heroic, had been slain as he led his men in charge against the rebelling tribesmen. It caused a stab of melancholy to penetrate many Spanish hearts and French flags were hung at half mast in respect to the hero, whose name had been a byword to three armies. Everyone knew that the *capitan's* life had been a tragic one. Everyone knew that he had an older brother, of whom dark things were said, whose nefarious activities had caused the hero and his family much anguish. And everyone sympathized with him. Now he was dead, this gallant and tragic figure, and the people mourned him. They did his body honor upon its arrival. It was to be kept in Tangier over night and sent to Spain the day after the fiesta, where it would be buried with great honor.

On the little Spanish steamer that sailed at noon that day from Algeciras, crossing the straits, was a young man also handsome in a way, inclined to be debonair, but rather reserved in his attitude toward his fellow passengers. It was Gyp Wisner.

Gyp had bought a faked French passport in Alexandria and booked passage to Marseilles. Landing there he proceeded to Barcelona and went to the dive where he had been hidden two years before. His suitcases and other belongings were still there. Likewise he hunted up, in Barcelona, certain of his friends who, he knew, could give him as much information as Desieux's man. For Gyp had quite as many channels for learning things as Desieux. He learned what he wanted to know, and then, with three suitcases, began his journey by rail across Spain to Algeciras. He was back again at his old tricks after two years at sea, back again in the old mould he had known before his flight on the *Cabo Spartel*. Again was he dressed nattily and expensively and again he had his old sense of misgiving, the fear of towns and the cramped feeling they gave him.

But he was through after this. No more for him. He was rich already and the loot at Tangier would make him wealthy for life. He would leave the town the morning after the job and go by automobile to Fez. There he would change cars and go to the Algerian border where he would pick up the railroad that would take him through Oran and to the City of Algiers. From there east. East, beyond Suez, any place. The Far East, perhaps India, perhaps South America. He had never been to South America. He would like the great capitals of the south, he thought, Rio, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, perhaps Havana. Oh anywhere. He would be wealthy. It made no difference where he was if he had wealth and he meant to have it in less than twenty-four hours, enough to last him a lifetime.

Now Gyp did not intend to steal the entire shipment of specie. In the first place that was impossible without the aid of other people and some conveyance that approximated the size of a truck. Since there were no trucks in Tangier and he did not care to bring in strangers (although he had a veritable army of swinish and villainous Moors to draw from) he had early decided to play a lone hand in the matter.

Always had he considered Desieux's idea idiotic. He planned along his own lines and decided to be content with part of the gold. With this in view he had brought with him two huge suitcases, empty, which he often had used before in his multifarious undertakings. Their exterior was innocent. They presented the usual leather to those that looked at them, albeit extremely heavy leather, and they were each bound with three heavy straps. Their interior was composed of a series of steel ribs, so close together as to make almost a solid lining. And both were capable of holding considerably more than their weight in gold.

Gyp boarded the little steamer at Algeciras along with many Spaniards, all teeming with excitement and given way to the gaiety of which only they are capable.

As the ship drew close to the African side of the straits and rounded Monkey Hill, the southern Pillar of Hercules, Tangier hove into view like a chromatic sunburst. It lay against the hills above its open bay, decorated with flags and pennants and streaming with colored bunting. It was mid-afternoon and the oblique rays of the declining sun shone brilliantly on the costumed city, now an international port, but which had seen the Carthagenians and Moors invade Spain, had, in fact, been a base of operations for both these races, and had known the governments of the Vandals and Cæsars.

The ship cast anchor, small boats drew alongside and bare-footed Moors hopped over the rail like a drove of monkeys. They importuned chatteringly in the name of the hotels they represented, each, according to them, the best in Tangier. But Gyp was deaf to all save those of the Bristol, a modest affair he had become familiar with when on the *Cabo,* where he would be unnoticed and left quite alone.

At the landing he showed his faked passport which was still unreported, and was allowed to enter the international city. Preceded by his Moors he walked the short distance to the hotel, registered and was given his room. After he had bathed, shaved, and dressed, he walked downstairs and out into the little square in front of the Bristol.

It seethed with people. Spaniards, Frenchmen, Moors, dignified Riffians (these latter down for the fiesta, later to return to fight against the very men they now rubbed against) were moving slowly in the square, which, being wider than the streets entering it, served as a basin where the human streams effected a confluence and swirled in eddies. The sidewalk cafés were jammed. Waiters flitted in and out among the laughing throng serving whiskies and anchovies, clams and wine, anything and everything the celebrants desired. Gyp sat down and ordered a drink.

He thought of what he had to do. Early in the morning, after the fiesta, and when the Kursaals would be crowded, seemed the most likely time. The revelers would then be in a more or less drunken state, the streets would be deserted, and the clerk at the hotel probably in a profound sleep, after the wine and cognac he undoubtedly would drink. Nothing in the way.

He had a plan of the Bank of British West Africa. From a Spanish acquaintance, a petty thief, he had bought the little chart. He was to enter the bank from the rear. A watchman, an old Moor, well over eighty, slept near the front door, and very likely nothing would awaken him that night, if he were there at all. If he happened to awaken during Gyp's working, that was up to Gyp. But there would be no noise.

The door to the vault was very old-fashioned, Gyp had been assured, and one with which he was quite familiar. It would not be difficult.

V

THE fiesta, held in an immense field on the southern outskirts of Tangier, waxed strong until midnight or shortly after, when the people began to trickle home. There had been dancing; there had been singing; there had been costume histrionics and pageantry, and there had been drinking. The cafés of the city had been packed to bursting, but, with the early morning hours, the merry folk were repairing to their beds, content with their part in doing homage to the sovereigns whose money had made possible the discovery of a hemisphere, and thoroughly the worse for wine and cognac.

Gyp remained at the scene of the fiesta until late, and then followed the crowd to the Kursaal Française, where there was to be more gaiety. The dignitaries who had come for the occasion were gathering there. There was a French general and a Spanish general, and the diplomatic corps were well represented. There would be further revelry and Gyp was enjoying himself.

He took a table by himself and ordered champagne. About him the enthusiastic throng made merry. The hostesses of the

Kursaal swarmed into the room, seeking the patronage of the unattached Spaniards and Frenchmen, whose womenfolk could not, with propriety, accompany them to such a place. They were snatched avidly. One of them, arriving a little later than her sisters, swaggered into the room. Gyp, as he caught sight of her, was startled. She drew him like a magnet. As he watched her he heard a rumble. Looking out the window he noticed that a storm was gathering over Tangier. Thunder rolled sluggishly in the hills. Lightning slithered between the tall minarets. Gyp turned again to the girl.

She was strikingly beautiful. Her straight black hair was parted in the middle and gathered in a knot at the back of her head. Her eyes were large and black, her lips furiously crimson, and her teeth white as salt crystals. She wore a sky-blue evening gown and over one shoulder hung a golden shawl. A huge blue comb protruded from her hair at right angles to her vision. She carried a guitar and, pausing in her progress across the floor, surveyed the assemblage.

The people caught sight of her and called to her.

"Sing for us Anita! Sing a song of old Spain!"

The girl smiled and raised her guitar. Gyp, watching her, caught his breath. She was incredibly lovely, he thought, marvelously beautiful. She thrummed the strings and tuned the guitar. The lights went out and the spot was thrown on her.

In the bright light the color of her gown and shawl were more sharply defined. Gyp was fascinated. He forgot about the bank, about the vault, about the loot. He was intoxicated with her and the color. She began to sing. It was indeed a song of old Spain.

It was a lament, a tragedy in melody. She sang as if the words wracked her soul, as if she were living the tragedy of the song. It might have been the wind in the towers of Granada, the sigh of the pines of Pyrenees, the moan of her race under the heel of the Moor. It was a song of death and black despair.

The room was silent as she sang, and Gyp sat as one hypnotized. He lived with her through the song, drinking the melancholy minors, breathing the elegiac melody. When she finished there was an instant of silence followed by a pounding rumble of thunder, and then a storm of applause. Gyp joined in it and sat down again.

He was surprised to find himself perspiring freely, and as he mopped his brow he shuddered. A slight breeze, the forerunner of the gathering storm chilled him and moved the drapes of the room slightly. That was a terrible song. Suddenly he felt angry. He was not sure at first just why he was angry. Then, looking at the girl again, he discovered he hated her beauty, her magnetism. He damned her. What a terrible song; what a horrible song. There was death in that song.

He arose with a jerk, paid his bill, and left. He must be at his work; he must leave Tangier; he would take the first automobile to Fez when day broke. More than all he must leave that girl and the terrible song.

It was but a few minutes' walk to his hotel. He hurried through the deserted and darkened streets. No one was about. Thunder poured through the narrow streets like water through a canyon. Lightning streaked down them like some white bird over a rapids. Gyp scurried along until he came to the hotel. Softly he entered and ascended the stairs. The clerk was asleep, as he had anticipated, deep in alcoholic slumber. He procured his tools and suitcases and started out again.

The bank was just up the street from the Bristol, but he did not stop in front of it. He continued until he came to another little square, then turned and walked south. A short distance in this direction and he turned again and walked back toward the hotel on another street. He had not gone far when he darted out of sight and up a narrow tortuous passage. He stopped. Above him was a window.

Using a large flat lever, with one beveled end, he pried the window open. He lifted his suitcases and tools to the sill and drew himself up after them. He paused an instant, then silently slipped inside. Lightning danced through the place, revealing desks and cages. He threw his torch around. The ray found the protruding vault which stood at his left. Treading softly to it, he threw the ray of his torch on the front door. Beside it, leaning back against the wall in a chair, was the old Moorish watchman, asleep. Gyp reckoned the distance between him and the vault and decided that he could not hear.

He went to work.

Quickly and softly he attacked the mechanism on the vault. He broke here; he pried loose there; he forced and unscrewed. Finally he reached the wires he was seeking. He manipulated them and the great door swung open as a terrific crash of thunder shook the building.

He pushed the door wide and entered, throwing the light of the torch before him. A long, wooden box lay on the floor. The specie! Part of it would soon be his. And then to Algiers. And then luxury for life.

Investigating further he found an electric light and turned it on. Then he turned to the box. He reached for his tools when a placard tacked to the cover commanded his attention. It was written in Spanish. He read:

"Place this precious burden in your safest vault. It is a testimony to the glory of Spain."

Gyp made a mental note that they were quite right, but that he was going to take part in the testimony. He took his lever and inserted it between the cover and the side of the box. He was about to apply pressure to the tool when he heard a noise behind him.

He wheeled quickly. He saw the old Moor standing at the vault door, shaking as if with ague. In his trembling and wrinkled hand the old man held a revolver. It seemed too heavy for his feeble strength.

Gyp snarled and sprang. He wrenched the gun from the feeble hand. Another movement and he had buried his dirk in the wrinkled throat as he held his hand over the dried and sunken lips. The ancient convulsed and gasped. He tried to scream but the dirk had skewered his throat and the gushing blood strangled his cry. He made a gargling, horrible, throaty noise and clasped his hand to his mangled throat. He staggered and fell, face up, next to the box. Gyp, holding the dripping dirk, watched his death twitchings, unmoved. The white beard was red now. The old man lay quite still in death.

Gyp turned to the box. He was about to apply pressure to the lever when a tremendous crash of thunder shook the earth. The light above him went out. Lightning played about the bank, darting into the corner and penetrating the depths of the vault. It illumined the death mask of the old Moor and Gyp started.

The eerie streaks terrified him. He turned away from the old man and applied his strength to the lever. There was the rasping noise of nails being wrenched from wood and the cover gave. Gyp, glancing at the body of the watchman, saw it in the lightning streak and gave a frenzied shove. The cover gave, complained, and came off, so suddenly that Gyp fell forward and over the open box. There was a blinding flash of lightning and Gyp drew back, rigid and trembling.

He had seen, staring from within the box, the face of the *Cabo's* captain!

He stood motionless for several minutes. He dared not move. Then, steeling himself he reached for his torch. He threw the ray in the box. It was the face of Romero! But younger and without the scar. Younger and without the evil on the features, a clean-cut Romero.

Gyp's head swam. The figure fascinated him. He leaned forward and over the box. He clutched the sides for support. He remained as paralyzed. His heart seemed near to bursting his chest. He threw the ray of the torch on the Moor. The old eyes stared vacantly at the ceiling of the vault. A fearful flash of lightning, followed by a great roar of thunder lit the vault as with daylight and the building trembled. The torch slipped from Gyp's hands.

He screamed. He rushed headlong to the door of the bank. He wrenched at the knob. His cries were in abject terror. He repeated them. The door flew open. He rushed out.

A rifle barrel pressed against his chest stopped him.

Behind it loomed the figure of a Spanish policeman.

Lone Clearing

The Story of a Dog's Unerring Instinct

By CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

SPRING came late that year to the upper Ottanoonsis, but it came then with a rush of penitential ardour, and the valley throbbed into life.

Yet for all this life and light and lavish beauty Lone Clearing still justified its name. It looked utter desolation. Bleakly set in the very center of its lean, boulder-dotted acres, naked of shade or shelter, stood a grey log-cabin, roof fallen in, broken door hanging from its hinges, shattered windows staring darkly like eye-sockets of a skull. A few yards to the right of the vacant door the ruins of an ancient, slab-built cow-shed had collapsed amid a jungle of dead weed-stalks. Some fifty paces to the front a clear spring, ice-cool, bubbled up through silver sand into a tiny, moss-rimmed pool, and ran tinkling off down the slight slope, its channel traced by two lines of earlier, intenser green.

Between two grey boulders close beside the spring stood a long-faced, dingy-fleeced white ewe licking and caressing a new-born lamb. From time to time she lifted her head and stared about her with anxious, frightened eyes. From time to time she gave utterance to an appealing bleat—but timorously, and in an undertone, as if afraid to call for help lest not help but some unknown menace should reply.

The ewe was a stranger to Lone Clearing, a stranger to solitude and the perils of the wild. One of a little flock of five imported the previous autumn from the Government Farm in the south of the province, she had spent the winter in the safe shelter of a sheep-pen in the settlement at Quah-davic Forks, in the fertile lower valley eight or ten miles away. In the spring the little flock, all strange to the backwoods, had been turned out into a southward-facing, upland pasture to browse on the sweet young grass as it sprouted up among the hillocks and charred stumps.

There, in the dusk of early nightfall, a lean black bear, hungry from her winter's sleep, had broken through the rude snake-fence and fallen upon the huddled flock, slaughtering two of them and scattering the other three in panic flight. Of these three the long-faced ewe, separated from the others, had plunged madly through the gap in the fence and dashed off through the forest. Blinded by her terror, and with absolutely no sense of direction in her sophisticated instincts, she had raced on tremblingly through the horrifying dark, stumbling over windfalls, dragging through mud holes, tearing her way through dense thickets which plucked hideously at her thick fleece, till with dawn she had come out among the young white-birches which surrounded Lone Clearing.

When her wild eyes fell on the cabin at its center her heart had leapt with relief. It stood for man, for all she knew of peace and security and comfort. She had rushed forward bleating with joy. She had thrust her eager head in through the doorway. But the emptiness, the desolation, startled her, though she knew not why. She drew back, and gazed about her. Then once more she essayed to enter. But this time her sensitive nostrils caught a strange, threatening scent; for a wilderness habitation, long forsaken by man, becomes a center of attraction to the wild kindreds. The bears had been there. She caught again that dreadful scent which had appalled her the night before. With a shudder she turned away from the cabin—though she could see it was quite empty—and wandered over to the spring-pool, where she drank feverishly. And there, between the two whitey-grey boulders, her lamb had presently been born.

It was her first lamb, and the young mother, already racked by her terrible experiences of the night, was now distracted by fresh terrors for this helpless and precious little being now dependent upon her for its life. She stared toward the dark masses of the forest beyond the fringe of birches. But from those mysterious depths what could she expect but peril? She turned her piteous gaze again upon the deserted cabin, and shivered at the memory of the menacing scent which haunted it.

AS THE morning passed toward noon the lamb gained strength to stagger to its feet and fall to nursing, and for a little while the young mother's fears were forgotten in her ecstasy of tenderness. Then her anxieties were revived by the sudden appearance of a big snowshoe-rabbit, which came hopping around one of the boulders and sat up on its hind quarters in astonishment at sight of these strange visitors to Lone Clearing. The rabbit, to be sure, did not look very formidable, but the young mother was taking no risks with the unknown. She stepped daintily over the lamb and charged, with a snort of indignation, upon the long-eared intruder, which fled away across the field in prodigious leaps, probably thinking the big, white, fuzzy animal was a new kind of bear.

Presently a large black-and-yellow butterfly settled on the top of the boulder, waving its painted vans luxuriously in the sun. The ewe eyed it suspiciously for some moments, then decided that it was harmless, and forgot about it. Then, with a sudden hiss of wings, a sparrow-hawk darted down upon the butterfly and bore it off. There was something menacing, deadly, in that low sound, in the swift doom of the harmless insect; and the ewe gave a startled snort. But the fierce little hawk was gone before she could give further evidence of her disapproval.

Sometime later, when the lamb was sleeping against its mother's feet, a big red fox came sauntering noiselessly down to the edge of the pool, thinking of frogs. A stray air brought the scent of sheep to his nostrils, a strange scent here at Lone Clearing, and he whirled about in surprise. At sight of the lamb his eyes narrowed and his long white teeth bared themselves, and he instinctively crouched for a rush and a pounce. But the attitude of the ewe gave him pause. Her head was lowered. She was stamping defiantly with her sharp little hooves. There was a savage gleam in her big yellow eyes. He halted, sat up on his haunches, cocked his head on one side, and reflected. Being an experienced and sagacious beast, he reconsidered his first impulse. Mothers, he knew, were sometimes dangerous. This one looked particularly so. Moreover he was not very hungry; and rabbits, which had no dangerous mothers to be considered, were plentiful, and as toothsome, on the whole, as lambs. The ewe snorted valiantly. The affair, he thought, was not worth investigating, at least for the moment. But he registered in his foreseeing mind the fact that there was a young lamb at Lone Clearing, and that the mother, in a day or two, might grow less vigilant. He flicked his fine red brush about and moved away at a leisurely trot across the field to disappear in the undergrowth among the birches. The ewe watched his departure with growing assurance; for he had certainly looked formidable. She began to feel drowsy as the sun beat down into her nook between the boulders, but, of course, she could not allow herself the luxury of a sleep. There was no knowing what new peril might confront her at any moment, in this land of unknown terrors; and besides, she had to keep standing up, in order that her body might give her little one due shade from the noonday heat.

As the whimsical fates of the wilderness would have it, that same day the long desolation of Lone Clearing was broken by yet another visitor. A certain big shaggy-haired dog, of about the pale tan color of withered grass, and answering to the name of Peter, had recently been transplanted from his old home on a farm below Quah-davic Mouth to a new, raw lumbering village many miles to the north. His own wishes had not been consulted in the matter. His master, in failing health, had been forced to give up the farm and move out to the Pacific coast. And he had sold Peter, who was a valuable animal of the "Old English Sheep Dog" breed, to the boss of the mills at the new settlement. Big, amiable, odd-looking, with a keen intelligence shining from his dark eyes behind the mop of whitey-brown hair which over-shadowed them, Peter had been warmly welcomed in his new home, and, like the kindly gentleman that he was, had accepted the attentions of his new friends with affable acquiescence. But, being somewhat set in his ways, he had not accepted the new situation. He was, by long generations of breeding, a farm dog, and he did not like the loud turmoil and confusion of the mills. He took a week to consider, and to get his bearings, and then, guided by a sure instinct, he slipped away one night through the forest, over the hills, and headed due south for his old home, his old associations. He gained the little lake which formed the source of the Ottanoonsis, and followed down the stream, through the wilderness of the high plateau. Versed in woods lore he had no difficulty in supplying his appetite, for the rabbits were abundant that spring. Striking an old wood-road he had come to a squatter's cabin, where he had halted to pay a friendly visit. He had been well fed, and both the squatter and his wife had fallen in love with his friendliness and sought to keep him with them by chaining him up with a piece of clothes line. This well meant breach of hospitality he had politely permitted, indeed; but that same night he had gnawed through the ropes and continued his journey unruffled.

And so, a day and a half later, Peter came to Lone Clearing.

WITH eager interest he trotted up to the open door, listened and glanced about for any sign of human life, then marched boldly in. His nose wrinkled resentfully at the strong smell of bear. He did not like bears. It was plain to him that man had not been there for a long time. The place was distasteful to him; but he explored it thoroughly, nosing in every corner, and unearthing from a pile of rubbish a nest of pink young field-mice, which he devoured. Then he went out again into the friendly sunlight, examined critically the ruins of the shed, trotted over toward the spring for a drink, and discovered the young ewe between the two grey boulders.

The watchful mother had already marked his coming. At first she had been filled with alarm and rage, for this was a huge and powerful beast and looked very dangerous. Then a whiff of his scent had come to her nostrils, the familiar dog scent, associated in her brain with friendly beasts, and with her natural protector, man. To be sure she had never seen a dog in the least resembling this huge and shaggy creature, but among the four-footed kindreds the sense of smell has perhaps a deeper influence than any of the other senses; and her alarm subsided, though not her suspicious hostility. When Peter caught sight of her, and started towards her, wagging his tail in delighted surprise, her stamping and snorting warned him most unmistakably to keep his distance. For a moment he was puzzled. Then he saw the new-born lamb, and understood. He had often before observed that mothers, especially when their little ones were extremely new, were queer tempered and amazingly unsociable. He backed away a few steps and lay down, his tail wagging hard, his tongue hanging out, his whole expression radiating benevolence. The ewe ceased her hostile demonstrations, but kept a warning eye upon him none the less. She was ready to tolerate his presence so long as he did not come too near.

And now Peter found himself with a

troublesome problem on his paws. What was this helpless, foolish sheep, so obviously a farm dweller, doing here in this place of desolation, this haunt of bears? And with her young lamb, too! It was clear to him that she was lost, and in grave danger. All his sheep-guarding ancestors conspired in his brain to tell him that he could not leave her to her fate. And he wanted to get home to his old master. Well, that would have to wait. He'd stay here, and protect the silly things till the lamb was strong enough to travel; and then, whether the ewe liked it or not, he'd continue his journey, driving them before him till he should reach some farm or settlement where he could leave them. Having come to this decision he got up and wandered off a little way to sniff about under the edges of the stones for mouse-nests. The ewe glanced after him with some anxiety. She was determined he should keep his distance; but, decidedly, she did not want him to go away! Lone Clearing had somehow seemed to her less haunted with terrors since the coming of that curious-looking animal that smelled like a dog.

Presently Peter, having satisfied his appetite more or less, returned to the neighborhood of the spring, curled himself up on a patch of warm moss in full sight of the ewe, and went to sleep. On a sudden he was awakened by a shrill *baa-a-a* which was unmistakably an appeal for help. Bouncing to his feet he saw the ewe with her back to him, facing the cabin, her head down, her fore-feet stamping furiously. The lamb, which she had thrust unceremoniously behind her, was bleating a feeble protest as it steadied itself on sprawling legs. And down from the cabin door came lumbering, with a deadly deliberation which proclaimed him sure of his prey, a gaunt and rusty-looking black bear.

Almost in a bound Peter gained the side of the valiant ewe. He planted himself two or three paces in front of her, poised stiffly on his toes, the hair lifting along his neck and back till he looked half as big again as his real stature. He growled, not loudly, not demonstratively, but with a significance which was not lost upon the bear. Peter knew well enough that he was not a match for this terrible adversary whom he was so fearlessly defying; but he was single-minded, and knew his duty. He was quite prepared to give his life in defence of this foolish ewe whom fate had put under his charge. At the same time he was a practiced and wary fighter, and knew himself more agile on his feet than the bear. And he counted on giving that hated beast such a hectic time as might discourage his appetite.

At sight of this great dog confidently barring his path the bear halted. He was not afraid of any single dog, however big, but in his experience wherever there was a dog there was apt to be a man not far off. And for man he had a very wholesome respect. His cunning little eyes searched the whole clearing anxiously. Nowhere could he detect any sight, sound or smell suggesting man. With a disdainful *woof* he came on again briskly, thinking to dash the presumptuous Peter from his path with one sweep of his resistless paw.

Lunging forward with sudden, amazing speed, he struck. But Peter was not there. He had sprung aside, mockingly, and stood poised again, several paces away, efficient, menacing, undismayed. With a grunt of rage the bear wheeled on his haunches, gathered himself, and hurled himself after this despised but exasperating opponent.

And at this very moment something utterly disconcerting happened to him. The ewe, beside herself with excitement, for an instant reverted through the ages to her battling, prehistoric ancestry. She charged like a fighting ram. Her massive, bony front, with all her solid weight and youthful vigor behind it, struck the bear squarely between the haunches with the force of a catapult, just as his own spring lifted him from the ground. Just at that sensitive spot it was an agonizing blow. It further propelled him on his way, of course, but it threw him off his balance, so that he came down hard with his nose on the turf, right at Peter's feet. And at the same instant Peter's long, punishing fangs slashed deep across his face and muzzle, completely blinding one eye.

Had Peter been of the bulldog strain he would have set his teeth and held on, the bear would have had time to recover his wits, and the fight could have had but one ending. But, fortunately, the bull dog's tradition was not Peter's. His tactics were those of the collie and the wolf, to slash and get away and come again. He leaped back, and so far forgot himself in his delight at the bear's momentary discomfiture as to utter a loud bark of exultation. This was a nice fight, after all.

But the bear was thoroughly rattled. The unexpected had happened so quickly that his native tenacity had not found time to assert itself. That inexplicable assault upon his rear, and the excruciating pain of it, diverted his attention from Peter. He whipped around to discover his new assailant. But he could see none. The ewe, having delivered her stroke, had raced back in a flurry to her bleating lamb. Here was a mystery; and the bear, like all the wild creatures, dreaded a mystery. It must have been man that had struck him. Only man could strike invisibly. Man might be anywhere, and unseen. Moreover that one joyous bark of the dog's, so assured in its confidence, suggested the approach of man. His heart turned to water; and he fled away like a frightened rabbit to seek the dark coverts of the forest. Peter, surprised but delighted at this easy triumph, ran capering after him, barking wildly but taking good care not to catch him and bring him to bay. All he wanted was to see him safely off the premises. At the edge of the clearing he stopped, kicked up the dirt vigorously with his hind paws to show his scorn, and trotted back demurely to the ewe, for whom he had conceived a certain respect. The ewe received him with a snort and a stamp, warning him to keep his distance. And the bear, growing more and more panicky as he fled, scurried on to hide himself in the black tamarack swamp beyond the ridge.

ON THE following day the lamb had grown so strong on its legs that the mother led it out with her while she pastured about the clearing; though she kept always near the spring and her two sheltering boulders, and carefully avoided the forbidding cabin. Then, on the morning of the next day, Peter decided that the lamb was strong enough to travel. He was thoroughly bored with the young mother's unresponsive company, and he wanted to be getting on.

He now adopted a totally different attitude toward the touchy ewe. He trotted up to her with a businesslike air, barking authoritatively. The ewe was puzzled and annoyed. She stamped and snorted, but Peter did not seem to notice. She made a couple of doubtful rushes at him, from which he merely stepped aside as if he did not notice them, and he continued that authoritative barking until she felt that she simply must obey it. It seemed to insist that she should go away, and that she would go in a certain direction; and at last she went, puzzled and rather indignant, with the lamb close at her side.

Down a little, grassy lane, scored by almost obliterated cart tracks, she moved slowly, while Peter walked behind her, not too close. When she paused irresolutely, Peter gave a short, sharp decisive bark, and she moved on again. Obedience to man, and to the dog as man's representative in the shepherding of the flocks, was in her blood. She began to feel a certain satisfaction, a certain shifting of responsibility, in obeying. And presently she emerged from the bush land into a rough, deep-rutted, stony road, running along beside the river. Here she paused again, not knowing whether to turn to the right or the left. But Peter knew. He slipped past her on the left, and headed her along to the right, downstream.

Peter was in a hurry, but he showed no impatience. His breed understood sheep, and young lambs. When the ewe showed a disposition to linger and crop the short sweet grasses that grew between the ruts, or when the lamb seemed tired or wanted to nurse, he stopped and waited, lying down and gently wagging his tail. About noon, coming to a spot where a dense old hemlock cast a pleasant shade, the ewe lay down, with the lamb against her flank, and fell into a doze. And Peter lay down too in that cool shade, with his long red tongue hanging out. But he did not sleep. He knew that all sorts of perils might lurk in the dense thickets which lined the unused road.

Suddenly he saw the ewe, whom he had imagined fast asleep, bounce to her feet as if stung, stand over her lamb, and stare up anxiously at the dark branches over her head. Her keen ears had caught a sound of claws rasping on rough bark. In a flash Peter was at her side, staring up also. He found himself looking straight into the pale, malevolent glare of a big grey lynx, which was crouched flat along a branch just above the sleeping lamb. The great cat's tufted ears were laid back along its skull. Its stub of a tail was twitching and jerking expectantly. It had been on the very point of dropping upon the lamb, when Peter's arrival spoiled its plans. It spat viciously, and dug its claws into the bark as if about to spring. But it had no stomach to try conclusions with a dog like Peter, and its attitude of challenge was mere bluff. It had learned that a dog could not climb trees.

As for Peter, he on his part knew something of lynxes. A lynx at bay he would have treated with the respect due its savagery, its swiftness of action, and its eviscerating claws. But this lynx in the tree, with its way of retreat open, was nothing to him but a great over-grown cat, and to be treated accordingly. He broke into a torrent of uproarious barking, and danced about as if he would spring into the tree. His loud demonstrations seemed to daunt the lynx, and after enduring it for a few moments it turned with a harsh snarl, bounded back into the tree, and raced away, leaping from branch to branch. Peter stopped barking and was content.

Along toward the end of the afternoon the travellers came to a little farm, a neat cabin with barn and shed, the farmyard opening directly upon the roadside. In the center of the farmyard stood a boxed-in well with a watering-trough beside it. A big man with a pipe in his mouth, and carrying two tin buckets, was just approaching the well. Peter surveyed the scene and decided that his responsibilities here came to an end. He steered his charges into the yard, drove them straight toward the man, and stopped, wagging his tail expectantly. But the ewe, who was thirsty, kept on to the watering trough.

The big man took the pipe from his mouth, set down the tin bucket and considered his visitors.

"I guess," he drawled, "you're Dave Arnold's dog, what he sold to Steve Perkins over to Long Lake Mills. An' you've hiked it all the ways back here lookin' fer yer-master. An' you've picked up this yere lost 'yo' an' her lamb on the way, an' brung 'em along. I've always heerd tell you was a wonder with the sheep. An' now I take it ye're handin' 'em over to me to take keer of. Eh?"

Peter jumped about and gave a joyous yelp. It seemed to him that this big man with the clear and kindly grey eyes understood him exactly.

"Mandy!" shouted the man, turning his head. And a comely young woman, with her sleeves rolled up, came to the kitchen door.

"Here's poor old Dave Arnold's dawg, what he sold to Steve Perkins way over to Long Lake Mills, come back here lookin' fer his master. An' he's brung us a strayed 'yo' an' her lamb. Reckon that's good luck, eh, lass? I'll go put the 'yo' in the pen, so's she won't stray ag'in. You take the dawg in an' give him a good supper. He's a great dawg. I've heerd tell he answers to the name of Peter." He patted Peter on the head and gently pulled his ears. "Peter, you go in along of Mandy an' git some supper." And Peter went happily, feeling that he had come among folk of his own kind.

That same night, however, he continued his journey, seeking his master. But when he reached his old home farm he found it in the hands of strangers, and everything changed. New horses, new cows, even new ducks and chickens in the yard. New things in the kitchen. Nothing the same but the old, bad-tempered yellow cat, which he had never liked. The new owners of the farm made a great fuss over him, to be sure; but he was puzzled and desolate, and could not help regarding them as interlopers. He left them after a couple of days, and went to every house in the settlement, looking for Dave Arnold. At last the universal thought of all he came in contact with in some way conveyed to his consciousness the idea that Dave Arnold had gone very far away, and that he would never see his old master again. Thereupon his lonely heart turned longingly toward the memory of the big man with the grey eyes who had understood him so promptly, and the comely young woman with rolled-up sleeves who had so intelligently fed him with just what he liked best to eat. And on the following evening he was back with them again. Again, as it happened curiously enough, the big man, with the pipe in his mouth, was just coming down to the well, with the two tin buckets.

"Hi, Mandy!" he shouted, "what did I tell ya? Here's Peter back again!"

The comely young woman came out from her kitchen laughing, and hugged Peter.

"I reckon he'll stay with us now," said she confidently. "I feel it in my bones."

And as that was just the way Peter himself felt about it, he stayed.

Everybody's Meeting PLACE

Where writers, readers and the editor gather for informal discussion

IT IS rather sad news I bring you this month, my friends. That is, it's rather sad from my own point of view. I'm leaving Everybody's. I'm being transferred from Everybody's to Delineator. Delineator, you know, is published by the same company. At least, the Ridgway Company which publishes Everybody's is a subsidiary of the Butterick Publishing Company which publishes Delineator.

So actually, all I'm doing is packing up my brief-case, putting a few books under my arm and, disconsolately, moving from one office into another across the hall.

That's what I'm actually doing but, in another way, I'm moving into an entirely new world. Delineator is a woman's magazine with a million and a third readers. Everybody's is primarily a man's magazine with some hundred and fifty thousand readers. While moving thus across the hall I've jumped miles of differences—in atmosphere, in feeling, in appeal. Like a chameleon I'll have to change my colors completely to adapt myself to my new environment. Wish me luck!

MY SUCCESSOR

THE man who takes my place as editor of Everybody's is William Corcoran. You already know him through his stories which have appeared in Everybody's. In fact there's one in this issue—*Leaning Joe's Deputies*. And perhaps you'll remember particularly *Prairie Feud* in the September issue. Mr. Corcoran comes well equipped to conduct Everybody's with experience gathered with Doubleday, Page & Company, publishers of *Short Stories*, *Frontier* and *West Weekly*.

It is usual at such times to meander on with many panegyrics. Let me just say this: Mr. Corcoran is going to be a fine editor for Everybody's and one you'll like.

He'll introduce himself to you in these pages next month.

A GRAND OLD LADY OF SEVENTY

EVERYBODY'S continues to get some exceptionally nice letters from readers. One that went straight to my heart was from a fine old lady who, for the amusing reason she states, did not even sign her name. Here it is:

I want to tell you how I am enjoying the September Everybody's. *Whippoorwill House* gives one the feeling that the writer knows Arizona. It is just the kind of story I thought should be in the —— or ——. One gets so tired of the same old thing. As for the —— or ——, what sort of stories does one get? Silly society and love stories. In Everybody's one gets some local color—*Roll and Go,* and others. Then your cover! Not some tiresome girl's head, but something individual and artistic. I congratulate you upon these covers. I am a woman of seventy, traveled more or less. Now I can not go to far places, but do so enjoy reading of a life very different from the one I have led.

Just imagine what joy—living in a pleasant apartment, all comfortable and cozy—reading about all sorts of people who do wicked deeds, and are profane. I never hear a man swear! No never!

Yours truly,

————.

I can not give my name very well; my children might be shocked at my sentiments if this fell into their hands.

PEANUTS AND OLIVES

THIS other letter reminds me of the man who didn't want to eat olives because he didn't like them and if he ate them he might like them. Only in this case it's peanuts. The letter comes from Omaha, Nebraska:

Everybody's Meeting Place, to me, is the appetizer of your magazine. I suppose I might be classed as an unintentional admirer of western, sea or sport stories. You see, your magazine is just like peanuts to my taste. Ask me if I like peanuts and I say, "No, I don't care for them." But give me one and I'll eat the whole sackful.

Once started I thoroughly enjoy Everybody's. My favorites are Beatrice Grimshaw and Ared White, although I never have read a story in your magazine that (after jumping in) I thought was poor, and I am a severe critic.

Please do not think that I am asking you to change your policy but I know that when it comes time to renew my subscription I shall think, "Oh, I don't care for western stories!" (And of course I shall not have the money.) *Unless* there should be a terribly absorbing serial or unless I should have the money immediately after reading Everybody's.

To this I answered and begged the reader to get started on *The Desert Moon Mystery*. I felt once started on that she'd have to continue. Don't you agree?

THE SCENE IS CHINA:

L. G. BLOCHMAN, who has had stories of China in Everybody's before, starts in this issue a series concerned with an American sergeant who becomes a general in the Chinese army. Blochman, who was formerly on the staff of the *Paris Times,* has recently come to America and is now in California. I had lunch with him not long ago and he told me some hilarious anecdotes about his life in the East. It seemed he went there with two other young chaps and they traveled from city to city in China giving vaudeville shows for the astonished natives. "But what could you do?" I asked Blochman and he answered, "Oh I'm pretty good at sleight-of-hand tricks!" Think of that in China, the home of the most adroit legerdemain!

Concerning the story in this issue Blochman writes:

I wonder if you noticed the points of similarity with the capture of Nanking, which the news cables tell of this week? The importance of Standard Oil Hill to the foreigners, the retreat of the Shantung troops "by arrangement," the Russian mercenaries. As a matter of fact, I had Nanking vaguely in mind when I wrote the story, as the Red Tower and position of the foreign settlement in relation to the walls and river shows. But as you have the date of the postmark, March 11, and the date of the actual battle of Nanking was March 23, you can see that the yarn is not "lifted" from the news columns.

SIDE-KICKS

IN THIS issue Henry LaCossitt appears a second time with a tale of the Mediterranean countries, *Hunted.* I hope William Corcoran will persuade him to tell you something about himself and his wanderings, in an early issue. Meantime, this clipping from a newspaper column is both self-explanatory and highly interesting. It is from *The Minority Report,* by John A. Long, in the McKeesport, Pennsylvania, *Daily News:*

In the September issue of Everybody's is a yarn by Henry LaCossitt called *Silent Eyes.* Henry was my side-kick on the trip to Florida and the Caribbees two winters ago, and the story in Everybody's is built on a horseback trip we made at that time through the tropical jungles to the Citadel of Christophe, perched on the top of a lonely mountain a mile above the sea. One of the Travelogues which I sent to Our Favorite Paper in the course of the trip described this weird Gibraltar of the hills, but Henry has caught the subtle and eerie atmosphere of the place in much more finished fashion, and has given us a sure-nuff plot to boot.

There is much true local color about the story. The citadel really does exist, and it is near the city of Cape Haitien (where the Santa Maria was wrecked on Columbus' first voyage). The character of Father John, the ex-Marine, is drawn from a real person, although we left him in a very sound and healthy condition in Santo Domingo city, after he had driven us overland from Cape Haitien in his Chevy. In the story Father John goes gold hunting at the citadel, defying the spirits which are supposed to guard the hidden store, and does not return!

The Cosmopolitan Hotel is mentioned. Ah, the Cosmo! If you ever chance to be washed up at Cape Haitien in the course of your travels, by all means put up at the Cosmopolitan. In saying this I am not playing favorites among Cape Haitien hotels. If things have not changed since we were there, and the chances are they have not, the Cosmo is the only hotel where foreigners (i.e. Northerners) can and do stop.

On its wide palm shaded veranda the small white population—the commandant of Marines, the Dutch steamship agent, the French cable operator, and an American planter—used to gather in the late afternoon, when the first cool breath of evening swept up from the half-moon bay. Pipes and cigarets would send the mosquitoes droning back to the mangrove swamps from which they came, a tumblerful of Bacardi would start the conversation, and, with feet on the wooden railing, we would watch the day die in the mountains back of the town. A barefooted colored boy silently gathered the glasses and presently a gong would echo from away within the high ceilinged rooms of the downstairs. It was time for dinner. Tilted chairs would return to the porch with a thump, ashes would be knocked from pipes, and the fast gathering tropical darkness would be left to the night wind and the stars. For dinner generally marks the close of the day in Cape Haitien, unless there is a band concert in the Place des Mars, or a dance at the country club which has been built for the few American officers who have brought their families to this lonesome but beautiful place.

But I started to tell you about Henry's story, and not to write one of my own. Henry mentions Petit Anse, a little village across the half-moon bay from Cape Haitien. And the Vaudoux, the mysterious religion of the natives, which is now said to be extinct. And—but get an EVERYBODY'S yourself if you are curious.

ROBERTS AND NIVEN

AMONG old friends, there are only two newcomers to the pages of the new EVERYBODY'S this month, FREDERICK NIVEN and CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS. They are, as it happens, both Canadians. Mr. Roberts, who has many books and short stories to his credit, is sometimes called "the poet laureate of the animal world." And did you ever read a more perfect animal story than *Lone Clearing?*

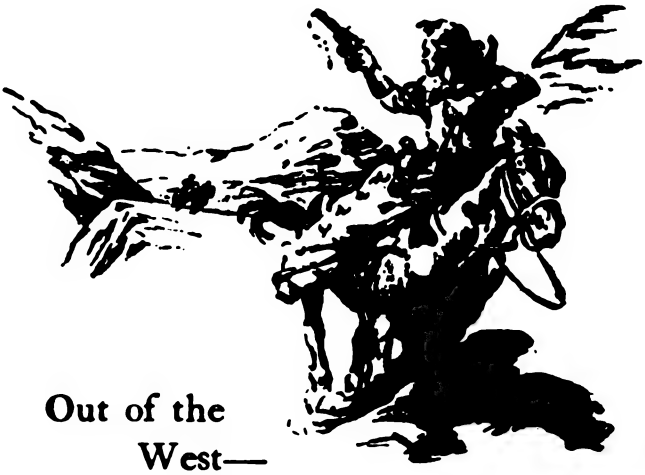
FREDERICK NIVEN also has many books to his credit. I remember reading a review of his last book, *Wild Honey,* an autobiographical account of hobo days, in the *New York Times.* What it said exactly I don't know but even that august journal spoke of it, I do recall, with admiration and respect. Aside from the exciting story which his new novelette, *The Golden Burros,* tells, I think you'll find a peculiar charm in the way it is told.

The others in this issue, as I have said, are old friends both to you and to me. Perhaps it is because of this that I feel such a genuine regret to say goodby to them and to you.

Even so, the new office is just across the hall and the door of that office will always be open to all old friends of

O. G.

THE NEWS OF NEXT MONTH



Out of the
West—

COYOTE'S BITE

by Charles Wesley Sanders

This novelette of the great ranges, of men in ruthless action, is one of the most glamorous and exciting tales by Sanders we have read.

A tale of the voodoo people

DEVIL DRUMS

by Howard R. Marsh

Marsh's first story in EVERYBODY'S is a genuinely tense novelette of black Haiti, a land of weird and gruesome mysteries.

Eight Splendid Short Stories

SILHOUETTES

by Ared White

A very unusual tale of the front lines.

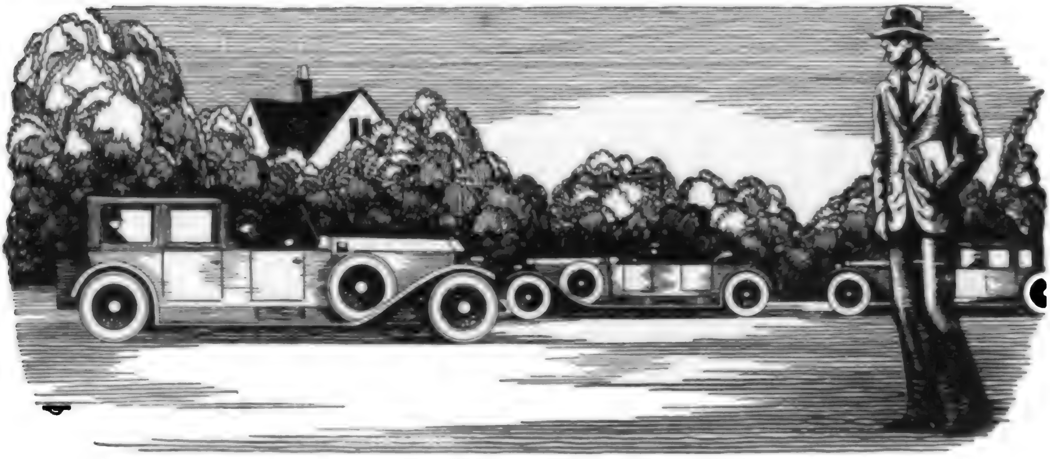
OLD SAILS

by Captain Dingle

A salty yarn of the old canvas days

And

A story full of the spell of the timeless East, CITIES OF FEAR, *by* CLEMENTS RIPLEY; *a brief and compelling tale of Siam,* PRESTIGE, *by* REGINALD CAMPBELL; *a yarn of action in the far reaches of the air above the border,* SOUTH OF TIA JUANA, *by* RAOUL F. WHITFIELD; *and other excellent stories of hazard and daring in distant places.*



Many times in the old days, while I trudged home after work to save carfare, I used to gaze enviously at the shining cars gliding by me, the prosperous men and women within. Little did I think that inside of a year, I too should have my own car, a decent bank account, the good things of life that make it worth living.

I Thought Success Was For Others

Believe It Or Not, Just Twelve Months Ago I Was Next Thing To "Down-and-Out"

TODAY I'm sole owner of the fastest growing Radio store in town. My wife and I live in the snuggest little home you ever saw, right in one of the best neighborhoods. And I'm on good terms with my banker, too—not like the old days only a year ago, when often I didn't have one dollar to knock against another in my pocket

It all seems like a dream now, as I look back over the past twelve short months and think how discouraged I was then, at the "end of a blind alley." I thought I never had had a good chance in my life, and I thought I never would have one. But it was waking up that I needed and here's the story of how I got it

I WAS a clerk, working at the usual miserable salary such jobs pay. Somehow I'd never found any way to get into a line where I could make good money.

Other fellows seemed to find opportunities But—much as I wanted the good things that go with success and a decent income all the really well-paid vacancies I ever heard of seemed to be out of my line, to call for some kind of knowledge I didn't have.

And I wanted to get married. A fine situation, wasn't it? Mary would have agreed to try it—but it wouldn't have been fair to her.

Mary had told me, "You can't get ahead where you are. Why don't you get into another line of work, somewhere that you can advance?"

"That's fine, Mary," I replied, "but *what* line? I've always got my eyes open for a better job, but I never seem to hear of a really good job that I can handle." Mary didn't seem to be satisfied with the answer but I didn't know what else to tell her

It was on the way home that night that I stopped off in the neighborhood drug store, where I overheard a scrap of conversation about myself. A few burning words that were the cause of the turning point in my life!

With a hot flush of shame I turned and left the store, and walked rapidly home. So that was what my neighbors—the people who knew me best—really thought of me!

"Bargain counter sheik—look how that suit fits," one fellow had said in a low voice. "Bet he hasn't got a dollar in those pockets." "Oh, it's just 'Useless' Anderson," said another. "He's got a wish-bone where his backbone ought to be."

As I thought over the words in deep humiliation, a sudden thought made me catch my breath. Why had Mary been so dissatisfied with my answer that "I hadn't had a chance?" *Did Mary secretly think that too?*

With a new determination I thumbed the pages of a magazine on the table, searching for an advertisement that I'd seen many times but passed up without thinking an advertisement telling of big opportunities for trained men to succeed in the great new Radio field. I sent the coupon in, and in a few days received a handsome 64-page book, printed in two colors, telling all about the opportunities in the radio field and how a man can prepare quickly and easily at home to take advantage of these opportunities. I read the book carefully, and when I finished it I made my decision.

WHAT'S happened in the twelve months since that day, as I've already told you, seems almost like a dream to me now. For ten of those twelve months *I've had a Radio business of my own!* At first of course, I started it as a little proposition on the side, under the guidance of the National Radio Institute, the outfit that gave me my Radio training. It wasn't long before I was getting so much to do in the Radio line that I quit my measly little clerical job and devoted my full time to my Radio business.

Since that time I've gone right on up, always under the watchful guidance of my friends at the National Radio Institute. They would have given me just as much help too, if I had wanted to follow some other line of Radio besides building my own retail business such as broadcasting manufacturing experimenting, sea operating or any one of the score of lines they prepare you for And to think that until that day I sent for their eye-opening book, I'd been wailing "I never had a chance!"

NOW I'm making real money. I drive a good-looking car of my own. Mary and I don't own the house in full yet, but I've made a substantial down payment, and I'm not straining myself any to meet the installments

Here's a real tip. You may not be as bad-off as I was But think it over—are you satisfied? Would you sign a contract to stay where you are now for the next ten years, making the same money? If not, you'd better be *doing* something about it instead of drifting

This new Radio game is a live-wire field of golden rewards. The work in any of the 20 different lines of Radio, is fascinating, absorbing, well-paid The National Radio Institute—oldest and largest Radio home-study school in the world—will train you inexpensively in your own home to know Radio from A to Z and to increase your earnings in the Radio field

Take another tip—No matter what your plans are, no matter how much or how little you know about Radio—clip the coupon below and look their free book over. It is filled with interesting facts, figures, and photos, and the information it will give you is worth a few minutes of anybody's time You will place yourself under no obligation—the book is free, and is gladly sent to anyone who wants to know about Radio. Just address J. E. Smith, President, National Radio Institute, Dept. P-2, Washington, D. C

J. E. Smith, President,
National Radio Institute,
Dept. P-2, Washington, D. C.

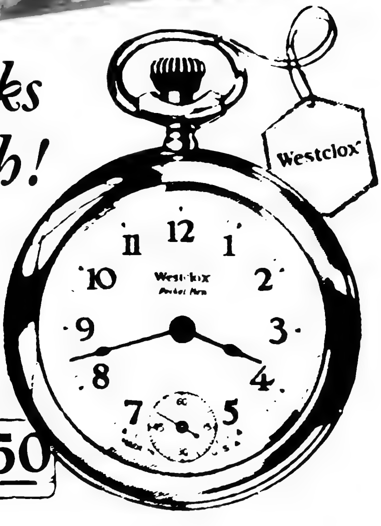
Please send me your 64-Page free book, printed in two colors, giving all information about the opportunities in Radio and how I can learn quickly and easily at home to take advantage of them. I understand this request places me under no obligation, and that no salesmen wil' call on me.

Name

Address

Town .... **State**

Ranks High!



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Benjamin Franklin said;
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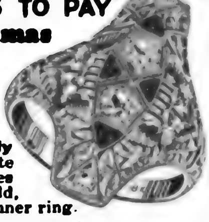

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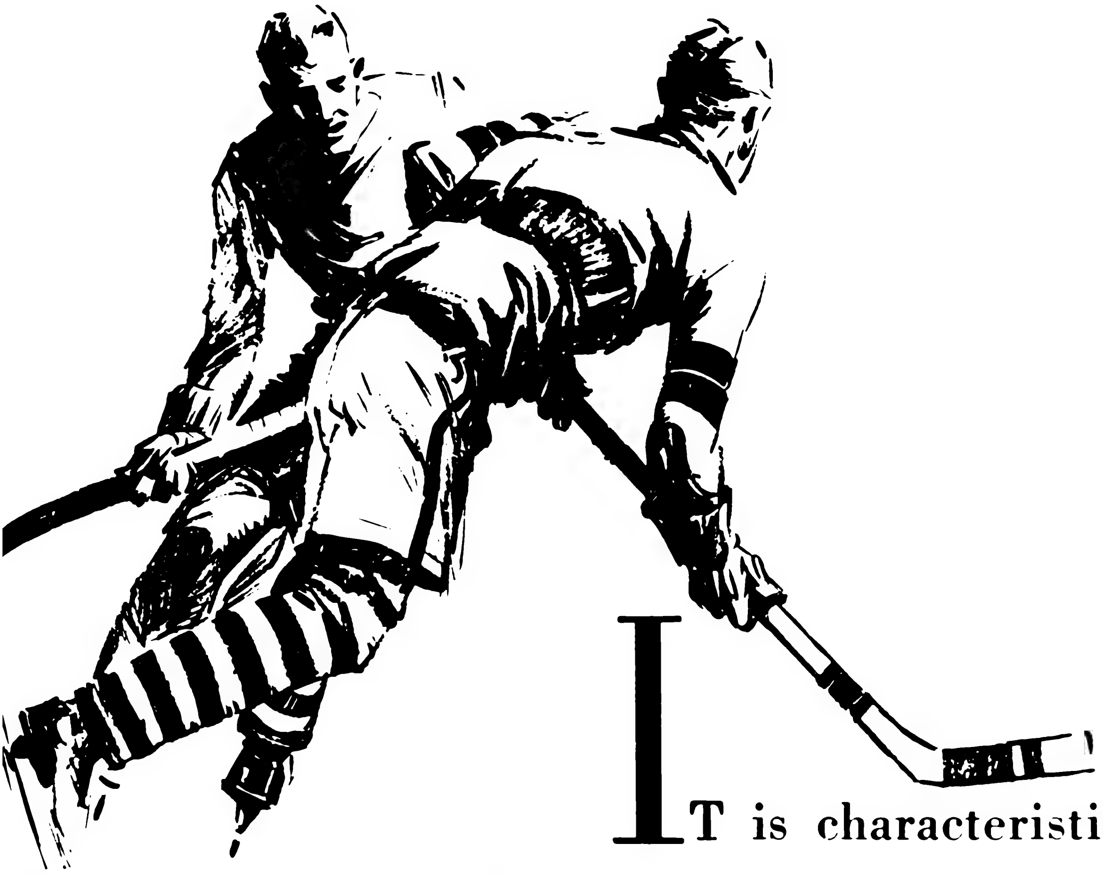
LEAVE IT TO THE YOUNGER CROWD TO KNOW THE BEST!



IT is characteristic of this younger set to settle the cigarette question exactly as they settle their hard-fought games—on the sporting principle of "may the best win!"

FATIMA

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TURKISH
CIGARETTES

A few cents more—for the best that money can buy!

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Another "Hashknife and Sleepy" Story by W. C. Tuttle

Who murdered Buck Dennig? "Tex" Blanco had a quarrel with him that night and suspicion rested rather heavily on his shoulders. And then the stage coach was held up, and the only tracks nearby were of high-heeled shoes! And somehow, sooner or later, everyone in Pineville—a peaceful little frontier town of the West, which couldn't even boast a railroad—seemed involved.

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All in the December 1st Issue

Adventure

Published Twice a Month—the 1st and 15th—25c

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—*Telltale Finger Prints!*

Written In Blood!

THREE bloody finger prints on the cash register! He might as well have left his calling card — his doom was already written! These silent witnesses told the story—identified him —convicted him! Live through these thrilling adventures right with Detective McDonald as he gets Arizona's first finger print conviction. Mail the coupon below and get this gripping story FREE, with 12 others just as exciting!

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The new improved model. More closely cased, antique bow and crown. Always dependable and sturdy $1^{50}
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Send me WITHOUT CHARGE, as a special offer, a $.50 tube of DELFIN Massage Cream; a $.25 tube DELFIN Deodorant; and a six months supply Skin Tonic. Also the dollar package of NU-ART for which I enclose $1.00.
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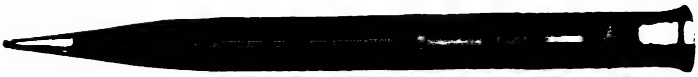
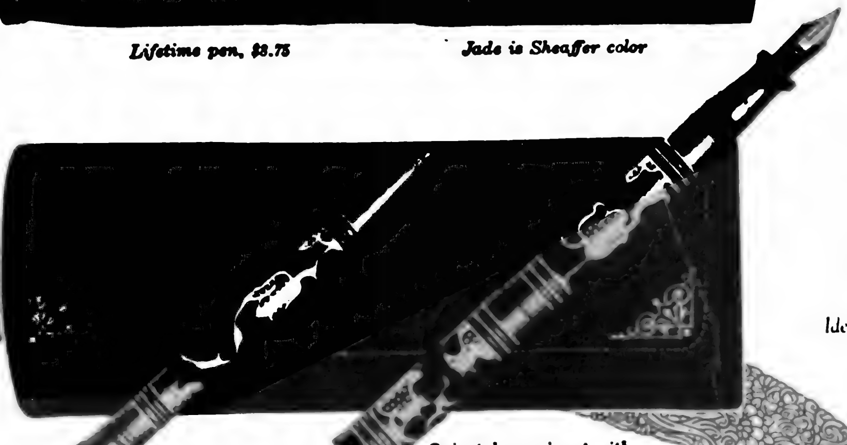
Radite pencil, $3.25 *Also in jade—Sheaffer color*



Titan pencil, $4.25 *Jade is Sheaffer color*

Lifetime pen, $8.75 *Jade is Sheaffer color*



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The world has acquired the fountain pen habit. Every year *millions more* people are using them, in large measure due to the dependability and beauty of the Lifetime° pen. Always it is an infallible writing instrument, made of brilliant, staunch radite, capable of making three clear carbon copies. An aristocratic pocket decoration! And it is unconditionally guaranteed for a lifetime. It ought to solve cleverly many of your Christmas gift perplexities.

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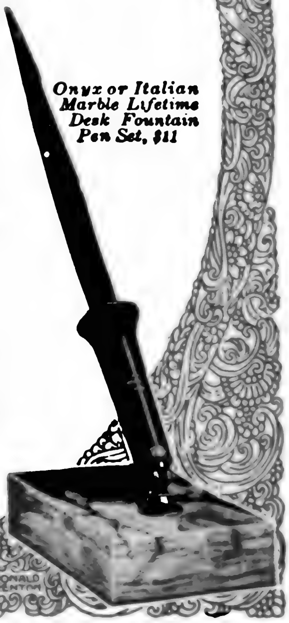

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SAY "BAYER ASPIRIN" and INSIST!

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That black, well-fruited, moist fruit cake that most of us, as youngsters, grew up to know as the real, genuine, honest-to-goodness Fruit Cake. Delicious. Keeps indefinitely. "The last word" at a bridge luncheon or a tea. If your caterer or grocer hasn't it, send $1.50 for one-pound cake; $2.75 for two pounds in handsome box. Delivered by parcel post.

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in candy—*Home-Made*

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FUDGE CENTER: 1½ cups pure cane sugar; ½ teaspoon creamery butter; 1 cup rich, full cream milk; 1 cup corn syrup; white of one egg.

CARAMEL LAYER: 4 teaspoons creamery butter; 1¼ cups corn syrup; 3 cups rich, full cream milk; ¼ teaspoon salt.

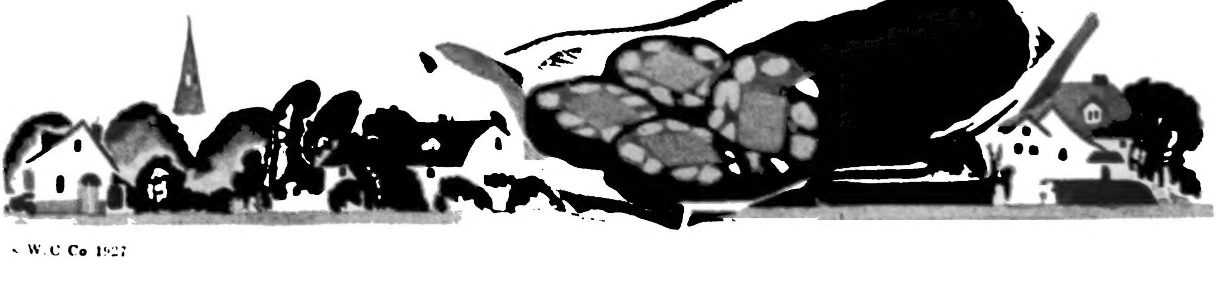
PEANUT LAYER: 3 cups prime No. 1 Spanish whole nuts, roasted in oil (hulls removed).

CHOCOLATE COATING: Melt one pound pure milk chocolate.

There's nothing else like home-made candy. Ask anybody. Except, of course, Oh Henry! And the very reason Oh Henry! *IS* so good is that it's made the home-made way.

We tell the world how to make Oh Henry! because we are proud of the fact that it's made of the very things that come out of your own pantry—made just as you'd make it yourself. You CAN make it yourself! But WHY when you can walk up to any candy counter and say Oh Henry!

Oh Henry!



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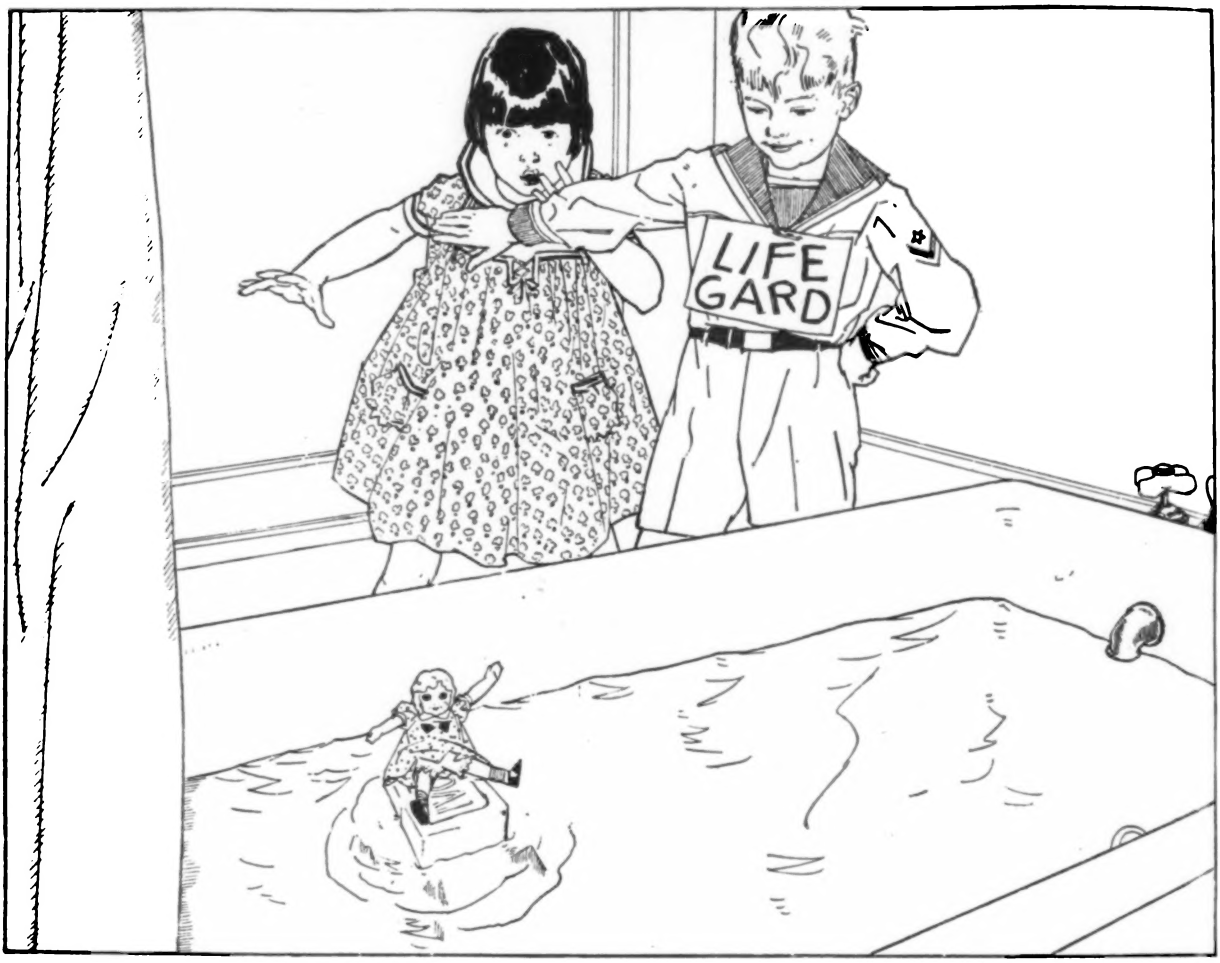

"Calm yourself, madam—your daughter can't drown"

IT FLOATS

$99\frac{44}{100}\%$ PURE

Bathing should be a joyful, comfortable, beneficial luxury —not a constant series of submarine soap-hunts. Ivory *floats!* On top. Where you can *see* it and *reach* it.

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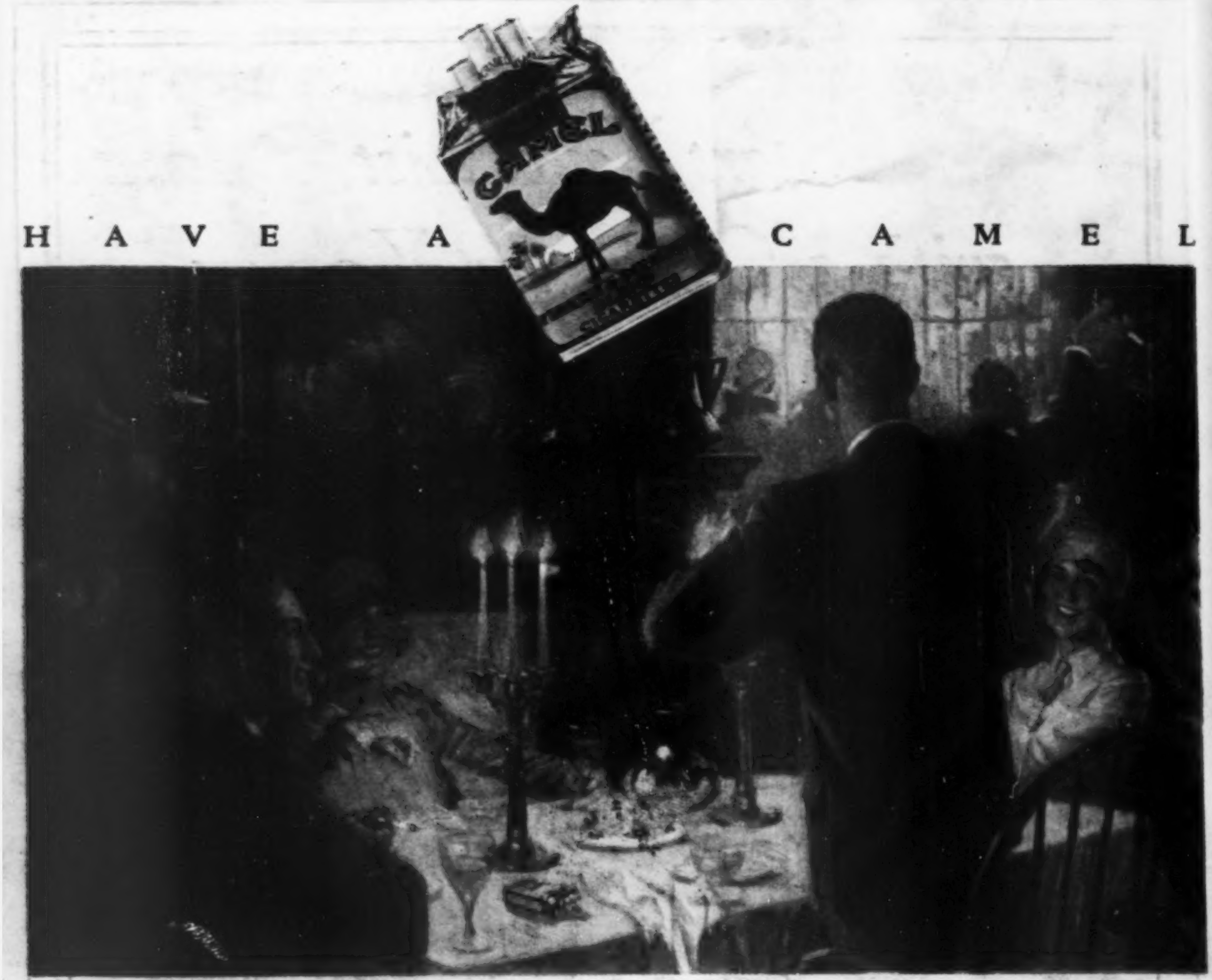
A Famous Gift That Everybody Wants

THE true spirit of Christmas is in a Kodak, as in nothing else. A spirit that means real enjoyment in the giving . . . a real thrill in the receiving. A gift that embodies the true meaning of the Christmas custom . . . lasting fun . . . perpetual joy . . . intimate friendships. For the Kodak itself gives all of these. Lasting fun in the never-ceasing opportunities it affords for taking artistic pictures . . . perpetual joy in the happy scenes it records forever . . . intimate friendships in the associations its pictures keep intact. Make this a Kodak Christmas . . . Kodaks $5 and up.

Remember . . . [illegible] Home M[illegible]
. . . Cine-Kodak Cameras, Kodascope Projectors and [illegible]
[illegible] $[illegible] [illegible] family.

EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY, ROCHESTER, N.Y., *The Kodak City*

HAVE A CAMEL



Here's to Camel—on a million tables!

HERE'S to Camel. How much added pleasure it brings to the world. Wherever congenial friends gather, or in the solitary hours of work or travel, Camel insures the enviable mood of enjoyment.

All of the mysterious powers to please of the choicest Turkish and Domestic tobaccos grown are brought to fulfillment in Camel. This is done through a smooth and mellow blend that cannot be found anywhere else. For America's largest tobacco organization concentrates its abilities in Camel. Into this one brand goes all of its power to select and buy and blend for taste satisfaction. There simply are no better cigarettes made at any price.

Camel's mildness and mellowness are the favorites of particular modern smokers. So much so that Camel's popularity is greater than any other cigarette ever had. For your enjoyment of the smoothest smoke ever made, *"Have a Camel!"*

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